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THE COURTSHIPS OF CATHERINE THE GREAT

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MANITOBA COLLEGE

T. WERNER LAURIE
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CATHERINE'S GIRLHOOD

PREFACE

In a volume published nine years ago on Catherine II. of Russia and her attitude towards the French Revolution, the French writer, M. C. de Larivière, classes Frederick of Prussia, Maria Theresa, and Catherine the Great with "King Voltaire" as the real masters of the Eighteenth Century. There is a justice in this verdict which makes it no matter for surprise that, while interest is still taken in what Mr Havelock Ellis calls "the most human century," books should continue to be written about any of the four. And of them all certainly Catherine is the most fascinating character. French writers may claim to have done their duty by her nobly, but, strange to say, she has been much neglected in England. The following book is only an attempt to look at some of the aspects of Catherine, with no thought of competing with the great pioneering work which has been done elsewhere, notably by M. Waliszewski. To that author, with his tremendous wealth of quotation from sources almost inaccessible, certainly not accessible in

England, the present writer begs to make his acknowledgments for guidance on very many points. Acknowledgments are also due to MM. Jauffert and Rambaud for the assistance derived from their writings on the policy of Catherine the Great.

It should, perhaps, be mentioned that in quoting from the "Life of Catherine II.," by the Rev. W. Tooke, the Islingtonian who became in 1774 chaplain to the English factory at St Petersburg, no attempt has been made to distinguish what is original in his work and what borrowed from Castèra, but quotations have been made from Tooke's third edition in almost every case. These two writers adapted from each other in turn so freely that it would, perhaps, be fairest to attribute the "Life" to Tooke-Castèra or to Castèra-Tooke.

PHILIP WALSINGHAM SERGEANT.

LONDON, *January* 1905.

CHAPTER I

CATHERINE'S GIRLHOOD

If Voltaire's saying be true about the happiness of a writer who should give to the world a history of Catherine the Great, it is certain that the happiness would be greater had the ingenious minds of some authors, whose works appeared soon after her death, found better scope than in collecting and polishing up every scrap of scandal which they could by search discover concerning her. She was, it may be admitted, from about her twenty-fifth year a woman whose life gave scandal the fullest opportunity to gather about her. But the writers to whom we have alluded, not content with the scurrility of a society journal in perpetuity, presented Catherine with a childhood in keeping with the womanhood which they distorted and the old age of which they refused to see aught but the evil side. So it is that whoever seeks to follow the career of Catherine is compelled to reject much and to choose but little that is not

established beyond doubt by the acknowledged good faith of a few authors.

The known facts about the early days of Catherine are not many in comparison with the abundance of legends which have grown up about them, but it is generally allowed to be true that she was born in the Pomeranian town of Stettin on the 2nd of May, 1729. Attempts have been made to prove that the event took place at Dornburg, where was the family seat of the Anhalt-Zerbsts. There seems, however, no reason for doubting the contemporary evidence of her father, Prince Christian-August of Anhalt-Zerbst, that his daughter was born at Stettin on the day mentioned. The almost inexhaustible conjectural ability of some German writers has been lavishly employed to show that not only was she not born at Stettin but also she was not the child of Prince Christian-August. In place of the latter some would put Frederick, afterwards the Great, who was only sixteen years old at the date of Catherine's birth, but who was, probably, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Dornburg in the previous year; others would ascribe the paternity to a young Russian. The point of these conjectures it is impossible to see; and it may be

taken for granted that the infant Sophia Augusta Frederika, who was to become known to history as Catherine II. of Russia, was the daughter of Prince Christian-August and of his wife, Jeanne-Elizabeth, a Holstein princess, who, though a friend of Frederick the Great, and bearing among her contemporaries in Germany a reputation for intellect as well as looks, appears in a very unfavourable light in her daughter's writings; nor does the daughter seem to have been unjust.

With regard to her life as a child, we must take Catherine's own word for it that it was not exciting. "I see nothing of interest in it" were her words to Baron Grimm, the correspondent to whom she wrote most freely; and in her Memoirs it is to be noted that she says nothing about the early days beyond the mention of a visit to Eutin. Yet there are some biographers who have shown a perverted ingenuity in the invention of a scandalous career for Catherine when barely in her teens. This is the mere licence of romancers, who have not the slightest foundation of fact on which to base their stories. The fullest history, as far as such is possible, of the future Empress's childhood may be found in the pages of

M. Waliszewski,[1] who pictures "Figchen"—for so Sophia was called in her own family—playing in the streets of Stettin with the neighbours' children, being treated to occasional blows by her mother out of sheer ill-temper, receiving an education mainly French, travelling about with her parents on visits to their numerous relatives, and in most ways having the ordinary life and training of German princesses of her day, without displaying any exceptional qualities to excite the attention of those who surrounded her. She had two German teachers, for her own language and for music, but the principal part of her education was entrusted to a Mademoiselle Cardel and to a French chaplain. For Mademoiselle Cardel she retained enough affection to send her furs after she had gone to Russia; but it appears that Catherine's liveliest recollection of her was that she complained of the excessive sharpness of her pupil's chin, which she was "always sticking out so as to knock into people." In justice to the French governess, it must be recorded that the Prince de Ligne, than whom Catherine never had a more devoted partisan, describing her at the age of fifty, remarks that her chin, "if not ab-

[1] "Le Roman d'une Impératrice."

solutely prominent, was certainly not retreating." But Sophia was introduced by Mademoiselle Cardel to the study of Racine, Molière, and Corneille, and the taste for French literature never left her. In the first profound dullness of her marriage she devoted herself to novels, until, tiring of these, she turned finally to Voltaire, who at once became her favourite author, and remained so until the outburst of the French Revolution stirred up her monarchical feelings, and caused her to detest France, the home of subversive doctrines.

Sophia was not quite fifteen years of age when, in the New Year of 1744, an invitation was received from St Petersburg for the Princess Jeanne-Elizabeth to come to Russia, and bring her daughter with her. The Anhalt-Zerbsts had been spending Christmas at Zerbst with Christian's brother, who had just succeeded to the principality. The purport of the message could, no doubt, easily be guessed. Though it was not written by the Empress Elizabeth its tone of command was plainly due to her. Elizabeth, who began to rule over Russia in 1741, had in the next year fetched to St Petersburg the young Prince Peter Ulric of Holstein, her nephew, and son of the Princess

Jeanne-Elizabeth's first cousin, and had proclaimed him her heir. A bride was needed for him, and it was a well-established custom in Russia to seek German princesses for the Royal Family. The French writer Masson, who was ten years at the Russian Court, almost tearfully, and at some considerable length, deplores the sad lot of such princesses, and denounces the mercenary conduct of their fathers. He points to the unhappiness of Sophia of Brunswick, wife of the Tsarevitch Alexis; of the Regent Anna, mother of the hapless Ivan III.; of the Grand Duchess Natalie of Darmstadt, first wife of Catherine's son Paul. He compares the young and touching victims to the maidens sent by Greece to the Cretan minotaur, and ends with a fervent apostrophe. Certainly the indignity, not to say cruelty, of these German fathers, content to send their daughters to Russia on approval, can only inspire disgust.

Peter Ulric of Holstein, now Grand Duke of Russia, had already been seen once by Sophia in 1739, when she was ten and he was eleven years old. Peter's father, the Duke of Holstein (of whom Catherine's Memoirs remark that he was "feeble, ugly, little, sickly, and poor"), had married a daughter of Peter the Great, who

died three months after Peter Ulric's birth. The Duke himself died in 1739, leaving his son under the guardianship of his cousin, Augustus Frederick, Prince Bishop of Lübeck. The latter assembled all his family at Eutin, shortly after the Duke's death, to meet his ward, and it was then that the husband and wife that were to be met. What Peter's impressions were we do not know, but we have the future bride's. At the beginning of her Memoirs she says that even at the age of ten Peter had shown a fondness for drink. One would hardly have thought that this would have been apparent to her at Eutin, but at any rate she says (writing, it is true, many years later): "It was then that I heard it stated, in the presence of the assembled family, that the young Duke was inclined to drink, his attendants finding it difficult to keep him from getting intoxicated at table; that he was restless and impetuous; without affection for those about him, and especially disliking Brümmer; that otherwise he was not wanting in vivacity, but that he was of a weak and sickly constitution." She goes on to say that he had a pale complexion, and seemed thin and delicate, and that his attendants, wishing to give him the appearance of a man, tormented him with re-

straints calculated to teach him to be false in character and manners alike—not an attractive sketch, it must be admitted. The Brümmer mentioned was a Swede, who had the post of Grand Master of Peter's Court both while he was under his uncle's care and when he went to Russia. A French wit said of Brümmer that he was a good trainer of horses, not of princes. He was brutal in manner, and was particularly hateful to his pupil. Peter's early education had been scanty on account of his health, and he was taught more of soldiering than of anything else. With his uncle (who afterwards became King of Sweden himself) Peter was brought up with the idea of succeeding to the throne of Sweden, his father having been nephew to Charles XII. The story was that when Peter was chosen by the Empress Elizabeth as heir to herself Brümmer did his best to corrupt the boy's character. Catherine says: "I have always doubted this atrocious tale, and looked upon the education of Peter the Third as a conflict of unfortunate circumstances." But it cannot be denied that in Brümmer Peter had a most unworthy tutor.

The letter which summoned the Anhalt-Zerbst ladies to Russia was written by this

Brümmer, though inspired by the Empress. It urged the importance of haste, and the mother was instructed not to bring her husband or say anything to anyone as to the reason of the journey. The letter itself said nothing of this reason either. But a communication from Frederick the Great immediately followed, in which he at least suggested that he had selected Sophia as a suitable wife for Peter. He had, indeed, in 1742 brought it about that the young Princess should have her portrait painted in Berlin, and this had been sent to Elizabeth. The Prussian representative at St Petersburg, too, had been instructed to urge the alliance. The Russian Vice-Chancellor, Count Bestujef, whose sympathies were with Austria, Saxony, and England against the present combination of French, Swedish, and Prussian interests, opposed the scheme most strongly; but the French and Prussian ministers together urged their views on Elizabeth, warning her against contracting for Peter a marriage with a princess of a more important family, who might be less docile than Sophia of Anhalt-Zerbst.

Sophia, of course, had no voice in the matter. She may have guessed the object of the journey, even if her mother controlled herself so far as

not to drop a hint, for both her father and her uncle were very solemn in manner when they bade her good-bye, and while the latter gave her a handsome piece of blue and silver stuff (which was afterwards to figure unexpectedly prominently in her story), her father presented her with a volume by Heineccius, the great professor, on the Greek faith. Catherine's Memoirs do not elucidate the question whether she knew what was proposed. The injunctions of Brümmer as to haste were obeyed so well that no time was given even for the preparation of a wardrobe. The Memoirs mention three or four dresses and a dozen chemises—not excessive for a journey of about a month. It was no exaggeration when she wrote, late in life: "I came to Russia poor"—proudly adding, "but I leave her as my dower Poland and the Crimea." It is recorded that when the orphan princesses of Baden-Durlach were brought to Russia in 1795 to marry Catherine's grandsons she examined their wardrobes, and said to them: "I was not as rich as you when I came to Russia." Yet in 1796 she was vexed at the penury of the Saxe-Coburg princesses, one of whom that year was married to Constantine.

In the second week of January, then, the

Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst and her daughter set out, and plunged into cold so intense that masks had to be worn to protect the face. At Memel the post-horses yielded place to peasants as drawers of the carriage, which did not make the journey faster or more easy. At last, on the 6th of February, the town of Riga was reached, and all was changed. What were Sophia's impressions of the receptions, guards of honour, bands of music, and other ceremonies which awaited them at Riga there is no means of knowing. Her mother was charmed, and told her husband that it seemed to her that she must be in the suite of Her Imperial Majesty or of a great princess. "It never enters my head that all this can be for poor me," she wrote. It was not; but she was not wont to consider Sophia overmuch. The Empress Elizabeth was at Moscow when they arrived; but they stopped at St Petersburg long enough to repair their lack of suitable costume, and meanwhile went through a great round of festivities, in which "the grandeur of her surroundings," according to her mother, "sustained Figchen's courage," while she herself felt the fatigue far more. The intentions of Elizabeth towards her guests were evidently well known.

All haste was made to get to Moscow in time for Peter's birthday, which was on the 21st of February. Peter was now sixteen, and still very childish, according to the Memoirs. His sole occupation in his private apartments was to make his two personal servants go through military exercises, and to give them titles and rank, or degrade them at his whim. "Real child's play, and a constant childhood," Catherine sums it up. But he seemed pleased at the arrival of her and her mother, and showed her much attention during the first few days. This attention was certainly curious, however. "I was silent, and listened, and this won me his confidence. I remember his telling me, among other things, that what pleased him was that I was his cousin, for owing to our near kinship he could open his heart to me with entire confidence; and he went on to inform me that he was in love with one of the Empress's maids-of-honour." He told her, however, that he was resigned to marrying her to please his aunt. She "listened with a blush to these family disclosures, and was astounded at his imprudence and want of judgment." Undoubtedly, Peter was frank to the point of imbecility, but what Catherine says of his confidences to her does

out of the sickroom. Sophia soon found that the Princess's general conduct had lowered her in everyone's esteem, as she puts it. Among other things, she sent to take from Sophia the piece of blue and silver stuff, her uncle's gift. Sophia resigned it at once, though prizing it very much. The effect of this was not lost, for the Empress loaded her with superb gifts of stuff, including a blue and silver piece, and it was easy for the patient to tell, from conversations overheard by her as she lay with closed eyes in bed, what Elizabeth and her ladies, who paid constant visits, thought about the matter.

At last, on her fifteenth birthday, she was able to appear in public again for the first time. "I fancy," she writes, "that people were not much edified with the apparition. I had wasted away to a skeleton. I had grown taller, but my face and features had lengthened out, my hair had fallen off, and I was deadly pale. To myself I seemed frightfully ugly. I could not recognise myself. The Empress sent me a pot of rouge, and told me to use it." The Grand Duke, however, did not seem affected by her "frightful ugliness." During her convalescence he had been a frequent visitor to her mother's

apartments, which were also hers, and he con tinued his uninvited confidences.

The Empress had returned to Troitza whe she was assured of Sophia's recovery, and th rest of the party followed her. But the relatior between Elizabeth and the Princess of Anhal Zerbst became exceedingly strained, owing t the fact that some letters of the French ministe the Marquis de la Chetardie, which had bee opened and read, were found to contain repor of conversations he had with the Princess abo the Russian Empress. The marriage schen nearly fell through in consequence. Cou Lestocq, of the Empress's suite, actually can into the room where the two children we laughing and playing on the window-seat o day, and said: "This merriment must stop once." Then, turning to Sophia: "You ha simply to pack up; you will return to your hor directly." He would tell them no reason, a left them. According to the Memoirs, the g saw that Peter would give her up without regr and for herself, the loss of him was indiffere but that of the Russian crown was not. Ho ever, at length the door of the next room open and the Empress came out, red-faced and ang followed by the Princess, with her eyes red a

wet with tears. The children hastened to jump down off the high window-seat on which they were still sitting together, whereon Elizabeth was moved to a smile, and suddenly embraced them both. Thus strangely the trouble blew over, and mother and daughter were sent to Moscow, where they now passed a much quieter time while Sophia was being prepared for her conversion. This was to take place on the eve of St Peter's Day, with the betrothal to follow next day. She was, plainly, quite ready to change her faith if the tale were true, which was generally believed at the time, that when her mother wished to send for a Lutheran minister, thinking her at the point of death, she asked rather for Simon Theodorsky. Her parents' wishes could not restrain her, and at last Prince Christian-August's scruples were overcome, and he gave his consent to conversion and marriage alike. Sophia was a far easier convert than her future husband, who, having been brought up a most rigid Lutheran, had given much trouble before he changed. He was most difficult to get to church, and, according to his attendants, used to display his irreligion before Simon. He was obliged, ultimately, to conform to the wishes of his aunt Elizabeth, who was a pietist, at

least outwardly, and even a persecutor; but Catherine's Memoirs say: "Whether it were prejudice, habit, or the spirit of contradiction, he frequently let it be seen that he would rather have gone to Sweden than remain in Russia." Brümmer had not made him hate Sweden, it seems.

It was under the name of Catherine Alexievna that the young Princess was received into the Greek Church, and the betrothal duly followed. After this event a regular Court was formed for the Grand Duchess elect, the principal lady being the Countess Rumianzof. But this increase of her dignity did not make her position any easier. In the first place, her mother and the Grand Duke became on exceedingly bad terms, owing, as it appears from what Catherine says, to the temper of the Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst, and her own situation between the two was daily more "thorny." Secondly, when the Court went to Moscow for the autumn she learnt that the Empress was furious with her because she (at fifteen!) was heavily in debt. She describes the scene graphically. Elizabeth chose an occasion when all were at the theatre, the young Count being in a box facing the Imperial box. Count Lestocq, after listening to

an angry harangue from the Empress, came over, and told Catherine the cause. Wells might be exhausted, the Empress had said, and she had never run into debt as a princess. The Grand Duke, who was sitting next her, took care that his aunt should see him joining in the lecture. Finally, her mother said that they had put Catherine in the way of acting without consulting her, and that she washed her hands of it all. Everyone was against Catherine; her only refuge was silence and tears. She admits that she was seventeen thousand roubles in debt. But she had come to Russia with hardly any clothes; the Countess Rumianzof, who was head of her household, was "the greatest spendthrift in Russia"; and she had found that everyone in Russia liked presents, particularly the Grand Duke. Presumably, however, the Empress forgave the extravagances, for Catherine tells no more about them.

In December the Grand Duke suddenly contracted small-pox, and Catherine and her mother were packed off to St Petersburg, while the Empress watched over the patient. Catherine did not see him again until February, when she found him much grown, badly marked, and quite unrecognisable. She could only stammer her

congratulations; but he had become hideous, she says. He was as childish as ever, and showed no desire for her company. She took refuge in the society of her waiting-maids or the younger ladies of her little Court; while the Countess Rumianzof, who was the terror of all, happily spent all her days playing at cards. Easter devotions, too, occupied much of Catherine's time; but Peter only showed a great dislike of her attention to these duties. He came to see her less and less often, and would only take her part against her mother, who treated her with querulous ill-humour, unworthy suspicions, and actual unkindness. It is difficult to believe that the young girl can have borne her tortures with the calm which she represents as having been hers. Yet occasional tears are all to which she pleads guilty.

Catherine in her Memoirs writes that, as the day of her marriage drew nearer, she became more and more melancholy, her heart predicting little happiness, and only ambition sustaining her. But she speaks of a presentiment that she was some day to become Empress of Russia in her own right. It may be that she had this presentiment, though it must be remembered that she is recording it many years after she had

actually become sole ruler of the country of her adoption. There is no doubt that the feeling, if it existed at the time, must have consoled her not a little. When the 21st of August, 1745, at last arrived the pomp and magnificence of the ceremonies, which continued a full ten days, must have brought weariness, which even the arrival of wedding presents from all over Europe could not dissipate. At the end of the ten days the bride and bridegroom went to live at the Summer Palace, where Elizabeth now was. Already Peter showed signs of his unsuitability for his new part. He still exercised his servants regularly in his room, varying this performance by changing his uniform some twenty times a day. What wonder that Catherine "yawned and grew weary"? A month after the wedding her mother left. Since that date Catherine had not seen her daily, and her manner is reported by her daughter to have softened much towards her, so that at parting Catherine was sincerely affected, and wept a great deal. The Empress Elizabeth did not weep, it is hardly surprising to learn, but told the Princess that it would have been better for all had her conduct always been as humble as it was at the moment of taking leave. With this remark of the Empress upon

her the unamiable lady passes out of the story, except for the brief allusion we have to two smuggled letters to and from her daughter in 1748.

Poor comfort as the presence of the Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst could have been, Catherine was still more lonely after her departure. The next act of the Empress was to remove Catherine's favourite attendant, a girl called Jukof, for fear that she might become too attached to one not worthy of her. The girl's family were also banished, and Catherine was at a loss to explain the persecution except as wanton. A move was now made to the Winter Palace, where the Grand Duke continued to show his preference for the society of his attendants, romping with them when he was not putting them through military exercises. Catherine, not used to spend her time alone in the society of men, solaced herself as best she could with billiards with Peter's chamberlain, Berkholz; but both he and Brümmer were shortly dismissed from attendance on the Grand Duke. Brümmer, whose departure, it is hardly necessary to say, delighted Peter, was replaced by Prince Repnin, whose frank and soldierlike character inspired Catherine with confidence. But Peter invented a fresh

horror for his unhappy wife — a marionnette theatre, "the stupidest thing imaginable," the performances of which she was bound to attend among the other spectators invited by Peter. When she took refuge in religion Peter grumbled. Catherine writes, rather quaintly: "I was inclined to devotion at that time. I saw plainly that the Grand Duke cared little for me." It was only a fortnight after their wedding when he confessed to being in love with another of the Empress's maids-of-honour. Since she also accuses him of discussing the relative merits of this lady and herself with his chamberlain it is not to be marvelled at that she considered it impossible not to be unhappy with such a man, were she to yield to sentiments of tenderness requited thus. She might have died of jealousy without benefit to anyone, she writes. But she did not die of jealousy.

As the Grand Duke had been entrusted to the care of Prince Repnin, so Catherine had soon a lady set over her household by the Empress. This was a Madame Tchoglokof, a relative as well as maid-of-honour of Elizabeth. Catherine describes her as very silly, spiteful, capricious, and selfish, and entirely under the influence of Count Bestujef, in the face of

whose opposition the late marriage had been carried out. The barely seventeen-year-old Grand Duchess wept all the day of her new duenna's arrival, which caused Elizabeth next day, looking at her eyes, to remark that young women who did not love their husbands were always crying; that Catherine had not been forced to marry Peter; but that, being married, she must cry no more. Naturally, perhaps, Catherine did not take this advice, and when Peter told her shortly that Madame Tchoglokof had been sent to look after her because she did not love him, she remarked that she could not understand how they expected "that woman" to increase her attachment to him. Madame Tchoglokof was, indeed, placed in Catherine's household as a spy. The Memoirs dryly remark on the unwisdom of employing an Argus who is stupid.

The question naturally arises whether Catherine had as early as this shown any disposition requiring an Argus. The early tales, repeated by French and German scandalmongers, may be dismissed as foolish lies invented to please a coarse age. Catherine's Memoirs are frank enough about the incidents which aroused the first suspicions. The Grand Duke had three

attendants of the name of Tchernichef, three brothers according to most accounts, but, according to Catherine's statement, a cousin and two brothers, all lieutenants, and sons of two grenadiers in the Empress's bodyguard. All three were tall and well-built, says Catherine, especially the eldest; and this one was a great favourite of Peter, who, in the period between his betrothal and marriage, was always sending Andrew Tchernichef with messages to Catherine. The young man was an intimate friend of Catherine's valet-hairdresser. Both were devoted to her, body and soul, she wrote of them afterwards, and were very useful to her in getting hold of information which she could not otherwise obtain. Andrew Tchernichef one day remarked to Peter that the Princess was not his intended bride but Peter's. The reason of the remark is unknown; but it took Peter's fancy, and with curious humour he used after this to call his young attendant Catherine's "intended." After the marriage, however, Andrew proposed to the Grand Duke that he should call Catherine *matouska*, and she should call him her son. Peter readily agreed. But Andrew's friend the valet warned his mistress seriously that her attendants were talking about

her, saying that she was in love with Andrew Tchernichef, and that, while the Grand Duke could do as he liked in favouring Tchernichef, she could not. In the innocence of her heart —the phrase is Catherine's own—the warning came on her like a thunderbolt. However, it had its effect, for Andrew Tchernichef thought it wise to fall ill, to the great concern of Peter, who did not, of course, know the reason. Andrew did not appear again until the next spring, and then an incident occurred, the circumstances of which were unlucky for Catherine, seeing that there is no reason to doubt that she was guiltless of offence. There was a concert at the Palace, and the ordeal of listening to the Grand Duke's performance—he was a most indifferent violinist—had driven her to her own room. As she was entering she saw Andrew Tchernichef waiting about, and stopped to speak to him for a few minutes. But Count Devierre, one of the Empress's chamberlains, a rather distinguished man to act as spy, opened another door at the moment, and saw Catherine at her door speaking to Tchernichef. The next day Madame Tchoglokof was installed in her post, and the Tchernichef family were sent to regiments at Orenburg.

Moreover, Elizabeth was so offended that she sent Catherine a message that she would dispense with her daily attendance in her dressing-room, and that Catherine must only communicate with her through Madame Tchoglokof. Catherine confesses to being delighted with the first part of this order. Nevertheless, under the petty tyranny of her new guardian, with her constant references to what the Empress would or would not like, Catherine spent a miserable time, particularly as she was now suffering from some weakness of the chest. Nor had she heard the last of the Tchernichef affair, for on the return of the Court from the usual summer holiday both she and Peter were sent to confession to the Bishop of Pleskof, their old religious instructor, and questioned by him, separately and together, on what had passed between them and the Tchernichefs. "But," adds Catherine, "as nothing whatever had passed, he looked a little foolish when he heard it asserted, with the candour of innocence, that there was not the shadow of what people dared to suppose." Simon Theodorsky was apparently so thrown off his guard by this candour that he expressed his wonder how it came that the Empress was impressed to the contrary. Evi-

dently there was no little desire to trip up Catherine, and the failure of the scheme seems a sufficient proof of her innocence. The Tchernichefs had also been closely examined, and, indeed, were kept in detention of a sort for some years. Towards the end of 1748 they were in the fortress at St Petersburg, whence Andrew managed to get a note conveyed to Catherine asking for several small things, which she sent him. Next year she received and answered another letter from him, then at liberty, and on his way to join a new regiment. Little more is heard of Andrew after this; it was his brother, or cousin, Zahar who appears at Court balls in the winter of 1750. The family had been forgiven by then.

THE GRAND
DUCHESS

CHAPTER II

THE GRAND DUCHESS

The first few years of the marriage passed uneventfully both for Catherine and for her husband, the removal of the favourite members of their suite naturally making things more dull than before. Catherine's story of this part of her life is detailed, and the picture she draws of her surroundings brings out prominently their terrible oppression. The Grand Duke and Duchess were like two children locked up in some monstrous nursery under the care of foolish and repulsive nurses. Even Prince Repnin was lost to them, for he fell ill, and his place was taken by Madame Tchoglokof's husband, whom Catherine plainly calls an arrogant and brutal fool. Here was another Argus; but there were means of soothing such as him and his wife, as afterwards appeared.

The devices adopted by Peter and by Catherine to relieve the irksomeness of the life prescribed by Elizabeth were characteristically different. Peter, in the country, tired

out every male member of the household with his manœuvres and drill, after which they joined Catherine's suite in the evening to dance before going to bed, weary and bad-tempered as the unwilling recruits were. He amused himself by training a pack of hounds — a harmless pursuit until he introduced a few specimens into a recess off Catherine's bedroom in the Palace during the winter. He played the violin, force and violence being the characteristic features of his playing, which was, moreover, entirely by ear. In St Petersburg his chief amusement through the winter season was in a large quantity of toys, which he spread over the bed after he and Catherine had retired for the night. He dared not be seen occupied with them in the daytime, so Catherine had to share his play until one or two in the morning. Did Madame Tchoglokof unexpectedly knock at the door there was nothing to be done but hurry the toys (some of them rather heavy, complains Catherine) under the clothes, and in the comfort of such a bed listen to the duenna's lectures on the wickedness of not being asleep yet.

That Catherine should ill endure the dogs, the violin, and the bed full of toys can easily be imagined. She had two solaces, reading and

shooting. The latter was only possible when Peter and she were at Oranienbaum. She describes herself rising at three in the morning, and, dressed in man's clothes, stalking wild duck along the coast, accompanied only by an old huntsman. The Grand Duke himself would join her after he had his breakfast. Her reading was mostly French. After one year given up entirely to novels she came by accident, she says, on the letters of Madame de Sévigné, and next on Voltaire; the latter produced an effect on her destined to last almost to the end of her life. Thenceforward she selected her reading with more care, and left the novelists alone. In 1749 it was to Plato and to German history that she devoted her attention. The Empress manifested towards her a constant coldness, sending Madame Tchoglokof to stop her mourning more than a week for her father—he died in 1747—as "he was not a king"; complaining that Catherine was overwhelmed with debt; and letting her hear a remark that, "clever though she might think herself, she was the only one who thought so." Elizabeth went so far as to forbid any visitors to the Grand Duke or Duchess other than those introduced by the Tchoglokofs, and the very members of their

little Court were ordered not to enter their private rooms or talk in any but an audible tone. It is hard to conceive at what the Empress was aiming in this cruel and ridiculous treatment of the young couple. It is not surprising that Peter, on hearing in 1749 that his aunt was seriously indisposed, only manifested elation.

The winter seasons spent by the Court at St Petersburg were more tolerable to Catherine owing to the balls and other gaieties of the Court. In these the Grand Duke and Duchess were allowed to take part. Catherine (who was now suffering the additional bitterness of seeing Peter making enthusiastic love to the hump-backed Princess of Courland, afterwards married to Peter Saltikof), evidently determined to make the most she could of these winter festivities in seeking relief from the martyrdom of her married life. This is plain from her Memoirs. Perhaps the most interesting passage in this connection is her description of herself at one of these balls in the winter of 1750. Her dress was intentionally very simple on that occasion, she says. "I put on a bodice of white *gros de Tours* silk (I had a very good figure at that time), with a petticoat of the same over a very small hoop.

I put up my hair, which was very long, thick, and beautiful, at the back of my head, and tied it with a white ribbon *en queue de renard.* I set one rose with its bud and leaves, exact imitations of nature, in my hair, and another in my corsage. A ruff of very white gauze was about my neck, and I wore cuffs and apron of the same gauze. . . . I never in my life remember having been so complimented by all as on that occasion. I was said to be as beautiful as the day, and absolutely dazzling. To tell the truth, I never considered myself very beautiful, but I was pleasing, and I think that this was my strong point."

In this winter of 1750-51 Zahar Tchernichef made his reappearance at Court, now a colonel. It was not until the following year, however, that Catherine paid much attention to him. The greater part of 1751 went by very quietly, and in the autumn the Court season recommenced at St Petersburg. Now at last the reaction from the general weariness of her life in the Grand Ducal household drove her into what was at least a very dangerous flirtation with Zahar Tchernichef. Catherine remarks that, for sake of old acquaintance, she had always treated him well, and that it rested with her to give what

interpretation she pleased to his attentions now. It is true he did not leave her much room for doubt, as he began by telling his future Empress that she had grown much handsomer. It was the first time such a remark had been addressed to her, and she did not take it ill. They commenced an exchange of mottoes, first printed, and afterwards their own compositions, enclosed in "devices" used in decoration at this festive season. "We were in regular and quite sentimental correspondence"; but the Princess Gagarin, who was their intermediary for the conveyance of the devices, suddenly refused to take any more, doubting the nature of the correspondence. Zahar had attempted already, on the ground of the insecurity of the means of communication, to obtain from Catherine an appointment to see her, either in her own room or wherever she would. But she refused, although he offered to disguise himself as a servant. At the end of the Christmas carnival he had to rejoin his regiment, and so the danger was over.

It would not have been reasonable, however, to imagine that Catherine would hold out longer against the temptations which assailed her unless she were exceptionally strong-minded, as well as

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of a very chaste nature. Now, strength of mind undoubtedly was hers, though she had little opportunity so far of proving it; the other quality no biographer can claim for her. Of her exact moral attitude at the time we have only the evidence in her later writings. Taking the Memoirs to be her genuine work—and there is no reason whatever for believing otherwise —we can only describe the outlook on the subject of what, for want of a better term, we must call the sex question as non-moral. The life which she led between the periods of which, and at which, she wrote must have produced a change, but, since it did not impair her general judgment, is not likely to have produced a total revolution in her attitude towards the question. Had she from what was originally an ordinarily strict disposition in such matters descended to a licence which made her name a byword in Europe it would be natural to imagine that her general character must have suffered. But such was not the case, for she remained to the day of her death clear-minded, regular, even methodical, in her habits, decorous in speech, and temperate in all except love. It would seem wiser to suppose her early attitude as not at least radically different from that which she manifested later.

And her position may be held to have offered her what excuse can be urged in such matters. A wife, hardly more than in name, of such a husband as the Grand Duke Peter, whose earlier childishness had merged now in a fully developed sottishness, she was isolated in the most corrupt Court in Europe, where intrigue was universal traditionally from Empress downward. In her private life she was deprived at once of the companionship of any woman whom she might find sympathetic, surrounded by spies, and plunged in a weariness which only her taste for reading prevented from being absolute. At Court, where alone she had escape from this other existence, she was, if without the Empress's favour and neglected entirely by her husband, at least a young and personally charming woman, who would some day be the consort of the Emperor. As such, she was a mark for the adventurous who knew Russian history and what rewards might be those of an Empress's favourite.

It was at Easter, 1752, that Catherine began to notice the attentions of Sergius Saltikof, one of two brothers whose mother was a great favourite of the Empress, while the family was one of the oldest and noblest in Russia. The other brother, Peter Saltikof, Catherine calls

"a fool in the fullest sense of the word," and she speaks of his great staring eyes, flat nose, and constantly-open mouth. Sergius, on the other hand, was very handsome, and also "not wanting in mind, nor in the finished accomplishments, manners, and style which the great world, and especially a Court, gives." He was twenty-six years old, and two years before had made a love-match. Now, however, as Catherine wrote afterwards, he paid court to every woman who was not his wife. Of this fact Catherine was not yet aware, nor that his two greatest faults were love of intrigue and want of principle. She might, indeed, have gathered them, since, after constantly ingratiating himself with the Tchoglokofs, and visiting them regularly, he at length revealed to Madame's ward that he came to see her — "drawing," as Catherine writes, "a charming and passionate picture of the happiness he promised himself." She reminded him of his wife, whereon he answered that he was paying dearly for a moment of infatuation. In those not, like Catherine, under the spell of Saltikof's beauty such a remark must inspire another feeling than the pity which she confesses to have experienced.

Catherine had, a little before her acquaint-

ance with Saltikof, come in contact with another person with whom she was destined to be on the closest terms of intimacy, though these have, undoubtedly, been exaggerated into something much worse by her detractors. The Empress Elizabeth appointed as a gentleman of the bedchamber in the Grand Ducal establishment, one Leof Alexandrevitch Narishkin, of a noble Russian family. This young man was a curious individual—"the most singular person I have ever known, and the one who made me laugh the most," Catherine declares. She also describes him as a born harlequin, who might have gained a handsome livelihood by his extraordinary talent for humour had his station been other than what it was.

The Grand Duke Peter, as might have been expected, was not paying much attention to his wife's doings at the time. He was, indeed, engaged in making love to one of Catherine's maids-of-honours — such a name as maid-of-honour seems doubly inappropriate for the ladies of the Russian Court in those days—and, moreover, he held the opinion that Catherine was fooling both Saltikof and Tchoglokof, using the former to play off against the latter. The Empress, however, had some ideas of the facts,

and Saltikof was advised by his friends to fall ill for a season in order to let rumours die out. This he did, and even when he recovered Catherine suspected him of beginning to relax his attentions. He became absent-minded, arrogant, and dissipated, so that she was vexed, and spoke to him about it. The intriguer replied that she did not understand the extreme cleverness of his conduct—which, she admits in her Memoirs, was true.

The episode which follows is of almost incredible baseness; but we are prepared for much in this period. The idea that Elizabeth might die before long could not be shirked; and the Grand Duke and Duchess were still without an heir—a fact which troubled the Empress. Catherine is our authority for what has to be related, and it might be thought that she invented the story to cover her transgression with Sergius Saltikof were it not that she had already admitted her fall. She says that, early in 1753, Madame Tchoglokof approached her, and, after dwelling on the subject of fidelity between wife and husband, pointing to her own case, went on to say that there were situations in which a breach of the rule might be demanded by a higher interest. Catherine says

that she was surprised, and let Madame Tchoglokof talk on, thinking that there might be a trap. The worthy mistress of her household then said that, no doubt, she had already "cast an eye of preference on someone"—Sergius Saltikof or Leof Narishkin, probably the latter. "No, no!" exclaimed Catherine. "Well then, Saltikof," said Madame Tchoglokof as she left her; "you will see that it will not be I who put difficulties in your way." If the tale be true the suggestion cannot well have originated otherwise than in the Empress's mind. Elizabeth certainly had no too high opinion of her nephew—"the damned fool of a nephew of mine" as she called him in a confidential memorandum once, with the directness of language worthy of another royal Elizabeth. And Peter about this time was not likely to inspire confidence. According to his wife's account, he was spending all his time with his toys and with strong drink, in company with his servants, Kalmucks and others. One day Catherine came into his room, and found him with great solemnity hanging a rat which had climbed over the walls of a cardboard fortress, and eaten two of his sentries, which were made of pith.

The year 1754 was memorable for Catherine. In April Tchoglokof died—"at the very time when we had succeeded in making him not only less ill-natured and mischievous but even tractable," Catherine laments; she had already written of him and his wife as being as tame as sheep. He was succeeded in the Grand Ducal household by Count Alexander Shuvalof, chief of the Secret Chancery, a sort of State inquisition. He was a man of repulsive appearance, afflicted with a nervous movement of the face. Catherine, now expecting motherhood, complains of the unpleasantness of this man's presence. She was suffering much from feelings of melancholy, and was full of apprehension that schemes were on foot to remove Sergius Saltikof. As a matter of fact, he was sent to Sweden to announce her child's birth. This occurred on the 20th September according to the Russian calendar. The Empress had the infant baptised almost at once by the name of Paul, and carried him off, and it was six weeks before his mother saw him again. Meanwhile she was left in her cold and draughty bedroom, ill-attended and feverish, to recover as best she could.

The question of Paul's paternity has been much discussed. Masson, after remarking that Cathe-

rine's subsequent conduct to her son was one of her greatest crimes, goes on: "Her dislike of him has been urged as a proof of his being Peter's child, and the argument is of considerable weight." There was certainly a resemblance of character between the Tsars Peter III. and Paul. There will be an opportunity of referring to this point later. Anyhow, Elizabeth now sent Catherine a present of one hundred thousand roubles; but her treasurer borrowed it back in a few days' time to give to Peter, who had been annoyed at getting nothing. M. Waliszewski draws a picture of the isolation and abandonment, now much more profound and sad, of the young wife and mother between the empty cradle and the long-deserted marriage-bed, and sees Catherine from this time entering definitely on "the path leading to the most colossal and cynical display of imperial licence known to modern history." Catherine seems to date her change of demeanour rather from after the birth of her second child in 1758. For the present, in her loneliness, she took refuge in reading, especially history, the writings of Voltaire, Montesquieu, Tacitus, and as many Russian works as she could. In this manner she spent the winter in her cold and narrow

room near the Grand Duke's apartments, whence all day long, and part of the night, came the noise and racket of a guardroom, and the reek of tobacco smoked by Peter and his associates. On the top of such trials came the faithlessness of Saltikof, who on his return from Sweden, and on his way to a new post at Hamburg, made an appointment to see her, and failed to keep it, owing to being taken off to a Freemasons' meeting by Count Roman Voronzof. In answer to her letter of bitter complaint he came and saw her, appeasing her without difficulty, "for I was only too ready to accept his apology." By his advice she determined to go out more in public, while treating the Shuvalofs, now in control of the Grand Ducal establishment, with sarcasm and contempt. She "drew herself up, and, with head erect, stood forth rather as the leader of a great party than as one humbled and oppressed." Peter, inspired by the Shuvalofs, made one ill-advised attempt to bring her to her senses (so he put it) for being so intolerably proud. Unfortunately for the effect of his lecture, he was drunk at the time, and, trying to draw his sword to enforce his argument, was told by her that she must have a sword too if he meant to fight her. Finally,

he was persuaded to go to bed. It is curious that he still, according to what Catherine writes, kept up his habit of consulting her whenever he was in a difficulty or his head was too bad to allow him to think. He had long ago given her the name of *Madame la Ressource*. She could not, however, prevent him from showing his Holstein sympathies openly, smuggling over a detachment of soldiers from that State to his house at Oranienbaum, and wearing Holstein uniform constantly, whereby he incurred his aunt's censures, as well as causing the native Russians to grumble loudly about the "cursed Germans."

About Whitsuntide of the year 1755 a new English Minister came to St Petersburg to succeed Guy Dickens, a diplomatist who made no name in Russia. The new man was Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, Horace Walpole's friend, a satirist and wit of some distinction, in spite of Johnson's sneer about "our lively and elegant, though too licentious, lyric bard," who "had no fame but from boys that drank with him." Hanbury Williams had, as it were, strayed into diplomacy in 1746, when he accepted temporarily a post at Dresden. He thereby ultimately ruined his life; but at first

everything was encouraging to him in his new career. Coming to St Petersburg after Dresden, Berlin, Warsaw, and Vienna, he appeared to carry all before him, and, indeed, he wrote home very early that he was "resolved to employ well the honeymoon of his embassy." Unhappily for him, his success in concluding an arrangement for some fifty thousand Russian troops to be at England's service in return for a handsome consideration was coldly received by his Government, which had meanwhile come to terms with Frederick of Prussia. Williams never got over the shock of the ingratitude, as it seemed to him, of his country. But his importance to Catherine's history was less political than social. He brought in his suite a young Pole, by name Count Stanislas Poniatowsky, then twenty-two years of age. Williams had met him when acting as English representative at Dresden, and also in England, whither Poniatowsky had gone on a visit, had taken an interest in him, and was glad to further his career by bringing him to Russia with him. Poniatowsky's maternal uncles, the powerful Princes Czartorisky, welcomed an opportunity of having a kinsman in Russia to support their scheme for reconciling Poland and her

hereditary enemy. Of Poniatowsky we have an interesting sketch from the pen of the Comte de Ségur. He says that Poniatowsky's father (who was a Lithuanian by birth) hoped to make his son an austere philosopher and a statesman; he became only a well-informed literary amateur, a witty courtier, a pleasing orator, and a brilliant squire of dames. He was distinguished above almost all his countrymen by the beauty of his countenance, the majesty of his person, the elegance of his manner, and the graces of his mind. In 1784 Ségur found his conversation agreeable and instructive and happy in its versatility; while he still preserved a part of his beauty, a majestic presence, a voice that touched the heart, and the most attractive smile Ségur had ever seen. It must be admitted that the portrait of Stanislas Poniatowsky in the Louvre, painted by Madame Vigée-Lebrun, fully bears out Ségur's encomium on his looks. Since Catherine always had a fervent admiration of beauty, it is easy to understand that the Pole's affected her strongly, supported as it was by a charm which conquered everyone with whom he came in contact at all periods of his life.

Catherine recalls meeting Hanbury Williams

first at a supper at Oranienbaum, he sitting next to her and striking her as lively and well-informed, while she soon heard that she too had made an impression on Williams. At this time, she records with some pride, she was generally well spoken of and looked on as a woman of mind. Her acquaintance with the English ambassador may, perhaps, be regarded as the cause of her introduction to politics as well as to Poniatowsky, for Williams, being unable to gain the Empress's ear, and not being regarded very favourably by Peter, set himself to gain over the Grand Duchess. He was, indeed, able to do her a great service by lending her, on behalf of his Government, large sums of money, of which she was much in need, being considerably in debt. The Chevalier D'Eon—that mystery who lived part of his life as a man, part as a woman, died seemingly a woman, but was then proved beyond doubt to be a man — states that England financed both Catherine and Poniatowsky; and as D'Eon accompanied the Chevalier Douglas to St Petersburg in 1756 on a mission from France, part of the duty of which was to watch Hanbury Williams, he speaks with some authority. It seems as if we must admit that

it was English gold which first induced Catherine to disregard her father's advice not to meddle in the affairs of government.

If it was through Hanbury Williams, first of all, that Catherine made the acquaintance of Stanislas Poniatowsky, it was through the Narishkin family that she turned the acquaintance into an intimacy which, though it might have little permanent effect on her life, completely altered his, and to his country brought extinction. Catherine found the Narishkin family more companionable, as she puts it, than the rest of the Court. Poniatowsky also soon got on the closest terms with the Narishkins, acting for a time as private secretary to Leof in the latter's illness, and writing for him several letters to the Grand Duchess, which attracted her attention by their lively and graceful style. Poniatowsky tells in his Memoirs that Narishkin hinted more than once at his chance of success in winning Catherine's affections, and repeated to him a remark which he had heard her make —"without intention," Poniatowsky explains— as to preferring the Pole to a certain Count Lehadrof. It seems that the intriguing Bestujef had thought of one of the two as a possible successor to Saltikof in Catherine's heart, which

he considered it better not to leave unoccupied. But "the Pole" hung back for three months, suspecting a trap. He had heard of Saltikof, but was unaware that the latter had offended Catherine. He judged Catherine to be very different from what she really was, imagining her set upon ambition, chiefly and at heart a Prussian; whereas he had been brought up to look with aversion on Prussia. And, not least of all, thoughts were in his mind of Siberia, which might be the fate of his presumption. But one day at Court the Grand Duchess in passing stopped and spoke to him, repeating to him a description which he had given to Narishkin of one of the Court ladies, and adding, with a smile: "I see that you are a painter." Catherine's advance, whether "with intention" or not, was not in vain. Poniatowsky ventured to address a letter to her on the strength of it, received a reply next day—and forgot that there was a Siberia. A few days later he was taken by Narishkin to see Catherine in her own part of the Palace, and from that time, he declares, his existence was devoted to her in a sense far more sincere than usually is meant by the expression.

This is how, some years later, Poniatowsky

describes his recollection of the bewitcher of his heart. She was twenty-five years old, he says, and it was just after the birth of her first child. "Her beauty had reached that point which is usually for every woman the highest she attains. With her black hair, she had a dazzling whiteness of skin, a vivid colour, large blue eyes, prominent and eloquent, black and long eyebrows, a Greek nose, a mouth that looked made for kissing, perfect hands and arms, a slight figure, tall rather than short, a carriage that was lively yet full of nobility, a pleasing voice, and a laugh as merry as the humour through which she could with ease pass from most playful and childish amusements to the most fatiguing mathematical calculation." It is interesting to compare this description with those of other observers given later on. It will be seen that Poniatowsky, if one makes due allowance for his enthusiasm, appears to picture Catherine's salient charms fairly.

The intimacy of the young Pole and of the Grand Duchess with the Narishkins made the growth of their acquaintance rapid. Leof Narishkin—the gentleman whom all at Court considered as "a person of no consequence, as,

indeed, was the case," according to Catherine, and who, when he wished to speak to her, used to mew at her door like a cat until she answered him in like strain and gave him permission to come in — did his best to enliven Catherine's tedium, and among other things planned an escapade for her. This was that she should disguise herself in male attire, and slip out one evening to visit his sister-in-law. Catherine was not permitted to go out at night, in pursuance of the Empress's rule for both her and Peter. Naturally, therefore, the scheme appealed to her sense of fun, never very dignified. The evening passed in the wildest gaiety, she was able to write enthusiastically, and when the conspirators met at the Court Ball next night it was all they could do to look at one another without laughing. Once started, they kept up these gatherings, in which Narishkin, his sister-in-law, Poniatowsky, and Catherine were the chief actors, and held them twice or thrice a week, visiting in turn one another's houses, including Catherine's room in the Palace, into which Narishkin ingeniously smuggled them. Peter, it may be added, was spending his time meanwhile in going to bed drunk. Catherine's amusement certainly might be considered the more innocent but for

the way in which it developed her relations with Poniatowsky.

Peter's manners were not calculated to keep his wife true to him. He still continued to give her his confidences. Having an affair with Madame Tieplof, of whom he saw much during the Court season but nothing at all during the summer, while he was away at Oranienbaum, he was very bored at receiving letters from her two or three times a week. Once he brought to Catherine a four-page letter from the lady, which, he complained, she expected him to read and to answer too! He thought of quarrelling with her till winter came round again. That would be the shortest way, agreed Catherine. But she distinctly objected to his intrigues with her maids-of-honour, and had to impress on him what sort of view the Empress would take of the matter if it came to her ears. He was chiefly devoted now to Elizabeth Voronzof, who had been assigned to Catherine by the Empress in 1750, when she was only eleven years old, "a very ugly child, with an olive complexion, and excessively dirty." Peter was alarmed at Catherine's threats about the Empress, and was less demonstrative for a while. It was a grim comedy that was played between husband and wife.

The political intrigues into which Catherine had been drawn reached their climax towards the end of 1756. The victory did not fall to the side on which was Catherine, if we can consider her of the English party. The Chancellor Bestujef suddenly announced to Hanbury Williams that Russia had acceded to the convention signed at Versailles between France and Austria. Bestujef had always been a moderate partisan of the Austrian cause, but Williams had apparently imagined that he had won him over to the English and Prussian side. The check was fatal, and in disgust the English Minister applied for leave, and quitted Russia. His humiliation affected his brain, and after two nervous breakdowns on the Continent on his way home he finally committed suicide at his seat of Coldbrook, near Abergavenny, in 1759. The Chevalier D'Eon alleges that Williams was recalled at Elizabeth's request, owing to his intrigues with the Grand Duchess, who used to sit up at nights translating for his benefit 'all such decisions of the Supreme Council as were favourable to his enemies. The story, if not unfounded, is at least unsubstantiated.

Poniatowsky still remained if his introducer, Hanbury Williams, had gone on his way to

death. As the result of a three months' absence from Russia, near the end of 1756, he was able to secure for himself the post of Polish Minister to Russia. He proceeded to use his influence entirely in the interests of his uncles, the Czartoriskys, instead of those of the King of Poland, and his tenure of the office, to which his appointment had been strongly opposed in Russia, was therefore short. But in the meantime his position was greatly improved, and he was enabled to continue near her to whom he had devoted himself. There was soon no secret in his relations with Catherine. Peter himself became cognisant of them, and showed no resentment. We have the lover's own extraordinary narrative of how this came about.

Poniatowsky used to drive out to some point near the Grand Duke's villa at Oranienbaum, which he then entered by a secret staircase. Sometimes Catherine would come out to meet him in the male attire which she always assumed with ease; at others the sentry was apparently warned not to see him. This seems to have continued for two summers; but on the night of the 6th of July, 1758, when Poniatowsky had called at Oranienbaum in the guise of a ladies' tailor (for a freak, we must presume), Elizabeth

Voronzof, now definitely the reigning favourite, aroused Peter's suspicions, and as the tailor left the villa he was set upon by three horsemen, and dragged before Peter. M. Waliszewski makes the Grand Duke apprehensive only of an attack on his own life, not on his wife's honour, but this is not to be deduced from Poniatowsky's account. On the contrary, Peter is represented as asking him point-blank to confess his real purpose. Poniatowsky, refusing, was rescued with difficulty by Count Alexander Shuvalof, who agreed with his remark that the less noise about the affair the better. After waiting two days in his lodgings in great anxiety Poniatowsky received a note from Catherine, from which he learnt that she had brought herself to make advances to Elizabeth Voronzof. He went, with a lighter heart, to the Court Ball that night, and, meeting Peter's favourite, whispered to her that "she could make certain people happy." "That is almost done already,' was the reply, and he was told to come to see Peter that very night. The interview took place at one o'clock in the morning, after Peter had dismissed a few friends with whom he had been smoking and drinking. The scene was a pavilion in the Palace grounds, built by Peter

the Great, where the Grand Ducal party was temporarily lodged. Peter greeted the astonished Pole with the remark: "What a fool you were not to take me into your confidence in time! It would have saved all this fuss." Poniatowsky complimented the Grand Duke on the excellence of his dispositions for guarding Oranienbaum, and flattered him generally. At the end of a quarter of an hour Peter said: "Now that we are good friends, there's someone wanting," and, hastening to Catherine's bedroom, he pulled her out of bed, giving her just time to put on a *robe de Batavia*, and brought her in, exclaiming: "Well, here he is! I hope you are all content with me." Catherine, says Poniatowsky, caught the ball on the bound, and answered: "We only want now a letter from you to Vice-Chancellor Voronzof, asking him to bring about a speedy return of our friend from Warsaw." (Poniatowsky, finding his position at St Petersburg very "thorny," as he says, owing to the strained relations between Russia and Poland, was about to leave for Warsaw, hoping to return with his position strengthened.) Peter wrote the letter at once, and the party then continued merrily until four in the morning. Poniatowsky swears to the truth of this weird

and sordid tale, which is not the less remarkable from the fact that he was Polish Minister to Russia. Catherine's Memoirs do not allude to it—which does not, however, tend to disprove it, for she had her reticences. Poniatowsky further states that he often went to Oranienbaum after this, and that the supper parties for four were repeated, Peter always showing a most friendly spirit. The attitudes of Catherine and of Elizabeth Voronzof would have been interesting to know had any record been preserved. Elizabeth, like the Prince whom she pleased, had the taste for strong drink; Catherine had no such inclination. One would imagine that the Grand Duchess and the maid-of-honour found the situation rather trying.

Catherine's second child, Anna, who only lived four months, was born on the 9th of December, 1758. As had happened in the case of Paul, the mother was immediately deprived of her infant by the Empress, and left almost entirely to herself. But, neglected as she was, Catherine managed to escape the extreme discomforts of cold and draughts to which she had been exposed in 1754. The Empress sent her a present of 60,000 roubles, taking the precaution this time of making a similar gift to Peter.

The welcome sum did not dispose the otherwise slighted Grand Duchess to accept the situation as meekly as she had before. She had now, as she tells us herself, made up her mind to take an independent path, and to save herself, her children, and perhaps the Empire, from the wreck which threatened all through Peter's moral and physical qualities. Peter had, before his daughter's birth, expressed his doubts as to the paternity, and when Catherine challenged him, by a verbal message through Narishkin, to express himself more definitely, his characteristic answer to the envoy had been: "Go to the devil!" Catherine kept her room during the early part of 1759, but was determined not to allow solitude to oppress her. She had a kind of boudoir fitted up in her bedroom, the only place which she had to herself, and this was cut off from the rest of the room by screens. Here she entertained Narishkin, his sister-in-law, and Poniatowsky, who from behind the screen could enjoy the situation when unwelcome visitors, such as any of the Shuvalofs, called. Poniatowsky had been recalled to Poland in the previous October. Catherine says that this warned her to "expect nothing good," and she promptly burnt all the papers which might

implicate her politically. She attributes the recall to the scheming of the Shuvalof-Voronzof faction; others to French influence at Warsaw. But Poniatowsky, on receiving his letter of recall, had fallen ill, and so lingered on in St Petersburg. Catherine records, with evident amusement, that the Pole was in the habit of wearing a fair wig when he left the Palace after her parties, and, when challenged by the sentries, of saying that he was a musician just come from the Grand Duke. It was thought needful to deceive the world, if Peter was not, and did not require to be, deceived. It is doubtful even whether the world was much deceived. Foreign diplomatists of the period speak with familiarity of M. Poniatowsky's relations with the Grand Duchess. It is difficult to believe that the Empress did not know. Yet in a great scene, which was shortly to be enacted, she did not reproach Catherine with infidelity as a wife. Possibly she recognised Peter's impossibility as a husband.

This scene arose out of the fierce political struggle which had long been going on, scarcely below the surface, in the Russian Court. Up to now the Grand Chancellor Bestujef had managed to keep his position amid many

difficulties. The Voronzof and Shuvalof families were using all the influence which they possessed to undermine him; while, in spite of the fact that he leaned to the Austrian cause rather than the Prussian, he was not warm enough to please the extreme Austrian party, who enjoyed the full assistance of the French representative at St Petersburg. Bestujef had recognised the dangers to which he was exposed, and had made overtures to the Grand Duchess Catherine, of whom he had been at first the most determined opponent. As she seemed willing for a reconciliation he appears to have gone the length of confiding to her an idea that, on the death of the Empress Elizabeth, which could not be very far distant, Catherine should in some way be associated with Peter in the administration of the Empire—Bestujef being, of course, their adviser. This scheme he confided to Catherine through Poniatowsky. She took a prudent course, and, while not rejecting the proposal altogether, pointed out its many difficulties. Suddenly a blow was struck by the anti-Bestujef party which took the Chancellor, Catherine, and the friends of both entirely by surprise. Bestujef was arrested on the 14th of February, 1759; while his friend, Marshal Apraxin, the conqueror

of the Prussians at Gross-Jägersdorf the previous year, was recalled from the command of the Russian troops fighting against Frederick. Catherine had been in correspondence with Apraxin as well as with Bestujef, though her letters to the former did not betray any political secrets. It was necessary that she should know what had been discovered. An appointment was made with Poniatowsky at the theatre, when the Pole was to let her know how matters stood. But Catherine, by Elizabeth's orders, could not go to the theatre without her maids-of-honour, and here the Grand Duke and she came into collision. Peter was still favouring Elizabeth Voronzof with his attentions, and objected to being deprived of his chosen society. He, therefore, forbade Catherine to go out. A great quarrel followed, and Catherine sat down the same night, and wrote to the Empress "as pathetically as she could," saying that she had incurred the hatred of the Grand Duke and the Empress's own marked displeasure; that she was never allowed to see her children; that she suffered from ill-health (which was perfectly true at the time) and constant grief; and asking to be permitted to leave Russia and return home. No answer came to this letter, and for

some weeks Catherine could not tell what would happen. At last, through the medium of her confessor, who was also Elizabeth's, she was summoned to an interview in the Empress's dressing-room. This meeting had a result beyond all her hopes.

Catherine gives a graphic picture of the scene. It was some time past midnight. She found, besides Elizabeth, the Grand Duke and Alexander Shuvalof present; while she suspected, and afterwards discovered, that John Shuvalof was concealed behind a screen. The interview lasted an hour and a half, the Empress all the while walking up and down the room, addressing sometimes Catherine, sometimes Peter, but more often Alexander Shuvalof. In a basin on the toilet-stand Catherine could see some letters; they were what she had written to Apraxin. Elizabeth displayed anxiety rather than anger. Peter was full of bitterness and passion against his wife, whose spitefulness he several times alluded to. But his stupidity, according to Catherine, caused Elizabeth rather to take her part, although she had begun by abusing Catherine for her stiff neck and self-conceit. At length the Empress said to her in a low tone, looking at the other two: "I have many

other things to say to you, but do not want you to become more embroiled." Upon Catherine replying that she too could not speak, though she wished to open her heart, Elizabeth's eyes filled with tears, and she dismissed them all about three o'clock, calling back Shuvalof, who came afterwards to Catherine's room, telling her not to distress herself, and that she should have a private conversation with the Empress soon.

What immediately followed was the restoration of Catherine to the Empress's favour, or rather the attainment by her of a better position than heretofore. She was given to understand that Elizabeth had once more denounced her nephew as a fool, while allowing that "the Grand Duchess had a good deal of sense." She was told to abandon all ideas of leaving Russia, as Elizabeth would never consent to it. And, finally, she was allowed to see her son, and at the end of May to have a private talk with the Empress. She appeared also in public after a long interval, to the confusion of the enemies who had thought her crushed. At this point her Memoirs come to an abrupt end, leaving Catherine in a position which was almost one of triumph. Bestujef had fallen, indeed, but his ruin had not involved hers.

The Vice-Chancellor, Michael Voronzof, uncle of Peter's favourite, succeeded Bestujef in his post of Grand Chancellor; while the office of tutor to the Grand Duke Paul was given to Count Nikita Panin, who had been in succession Russian Minister at the Courts of Denmark and Sweden. Panin has been described as a pupil of Bestujef, and as similarly a moderate pro-Austrian. The reason for calling him the latter is difficult to see, since his policy, when he became Catherine's Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1762, was a continuation of Peter's friendship for Prussia. Panin has hardly had justice done to him by the historians. It was really a remarkable feat for the man only made tutor to her son in 1759 to be able to obtain, as the price of his support, the direction of Catherine's foreign policy three years later, and to keep it almost to the end of his life, although it was not on the lines most welcome to her. Panin seems neither to have looked nor to have been considered as astute as he was. In appearance, he was described in 1762 as "a pale valetudinarian, much beyond the middle age" —in reality forty-four—"studious only of ease, having passed all his life in Courts, extremely precise in his dress, wearing a stately wig, with

three well-powdered ties dangling upon his back, and altogether giving one the pasteboard idea of an old courtier of Louis XIV."[1]

The fall of Bestujef was followed by the departure of Poniatowsky, who could no longer keep up his pretence of illness. He was not destined to see Catherine again till 1787, when, thanks to her, he had been King of Poland for twenty-three years. He records himself that in the winter of 1763-1764, when Catherine, now Empress, was pressing, through her representative at Warsaw, his election to the Polish throne, he wrote to her twice, saying: "Do not make me King, but recall me to your side." Catherine replied that she could not tell him of all the obstacles there were to such a course, that she had to be very careful, and that she was frightened to death at his letters. The main obstacle was, of course, Gregory Orlof. It would seem from the demeanour of Empress and King at their memorable encounter at Kanief, twenty-eight years after their parting, that Stanislas still remained a lover. It is hard

[1] The Princess Dashkof's Memoirs. Count Panin and his younger brother, General Panin, were first cousins of the mother of Prince Dashkof—his uncles, according to the Russian style—and so generally called his wife's uncles as well.

to say how deep was Catherine's early attachment to him; she was, undoubtedly, much under the influence of that charm which all found in him. But she took very little time to replace him now, and with a man of a very different stamp. M. Waliszewski advances the singular theory that Catherine acquired her love of change in the affairs of her heart as she educated herself to be a Russian—a process which brought with it the imperious need for strong contrasts felt by this people of a precocious civilisation. Catherine was not Russianised for nothing, he remarks.

In his entertaining Memoirs Sir Nathaniel Wraxall devotes a little space to some "curious facts" concerning the Empresses Elizabeth and Catherine of Russia, told him by Mr (afterwards Sir) Thomas Wroughton, who had gone to the British Embassy at St Petersburg late in Elizabeth's reign. Wroughton, who always spoke of Catherine "with admiration and respect, though with freedom," related to Wraxall how, at some Court ceremony at the Winter Palace in 1760, he was walking with the Grand Duchess leaning on his arm, when she pointed out to him an officer in the uniform of the Guards, and said: "Do you see that good-

looking young man? Do you know him? His name is Orlof. Would you believe that he has had the boldness to make love to me?" "He is indeed bold, madame," replied Wroughton, with a smile. He told Wraxall that Catherine's words made a deep impression on him. The story has the appearance of truth. Baron de Breteuil similarly records, when speaking of Orlof's elevation after the Revolution of 1762, his remembrance of Catherine having once pointed out Orlof to him as "an absurd creature" and telling of his extravagant proceedings. Breteuil says that there was no doubt that Catherine had found a successor to M. Poniatowsky.

Gregory Orlof first comes into notice at the age of nineteen, when he was told off to attend on the aide-de-camp of Frederick the Great, Count Schwerin, who paid a visit to St Petersburg early in 1759. Gregory was the second of five brothers, all of whom were at one time in the Imperial Guards. He had particularly distinguished himself in the Russian disaster at Zorndorf in the previous year, being thrice wounded, and he was already noted for his exceeding handsomeness and his height. In the latter respect he and his brother Alexis

were reputed to have but one rival in Russia. The Orlofs' birth and education were against them, and Gregory did not, any more than the others, hide such deficiencies by natural intelligence. His only amusements in the Guards, according to his contemporaries, were drinking, gambling, and love-making—the usual pastimes of his associates — but he excelled the rest, inasmuch as he had made himself known thus in St Petersburg in 1760. He got a post as aide-de-camp to one of the Shuvalofs, Count Peter, the Grand Master of Artillery (declared by Rulhière to have been the most vainglorious man in all Russia), but he was soon in trouble through his success in alienating the affections of Princess Helen Kurakin, a celebrated Court beauty, and Shuvalof's mistress. According to the imaginative Rulhière, Orlof was only saved from Siberia by Catherine. It seems probable that Catherine was really spurred by curiosity at Orlof's reputation (or by pity at the disaster which had befallen him, suggests Tooke) to make his acquaintance. She is said to have exerted herself so far in his favour that, after the death of Count Peter Shuvalof, which happened very soon, Orlof was given the post of Paymaster of Artillery. She may have had

a further design beyond the wish for the advancement of one who attracted her. Catherine cannot have been without thought of the time, soon coming, when she would want all the friends whom she could make. As has been seen, as early as the end of 1758 she had determined to take an independent course, and not to bind herself to stand or fall with Peter. Hanbury Williams, indeed, attributes to her earlier still actual designs on the throne as soon as Elizabeth should die. M. Waliszewski suggests that Catherine loved Orlof "not only for his beauty, courage, and daring but also for the four regiments which he and his brothers seemed to hold in their hands." The most important of these brothers were Alexis, afterwards the Admiral; and Ivan, the eldest, who, though we hear little of him, was generously rewarded after the Revolution. Theodore and Vladimir were younger, and of little account yet. But the whole family were united, and were most useful adherents.

Whatever, and however mixed, Catherine's motives in taking up the friendship of Gregory Orlof, there is no doubt that an intrigue began. There seems to have been little care taken to conceal the fact, and Catherine's own words are

quoted (from a letter of August 1762 to Poniatowsky) to show that Orlof compromised her quite recklessly. Yet, strangely enough, Rulhière, who was attached to the French Embassy at St Peterburg in 1762, and was, therefore, almost an eye-witness, says that "never was intrigue conducted with more art and reserve," and that it was only after Orlof had been publicly acknowledged that the courtiers recollected signs of a secret understanding before. But, whether the love affair was conducted discreetly or not — and Peter is not likely to have cared much—it is certain that no hint was allowed to escape from Catherine of a political intrigue. Plots of various kinds, however, were in the air. It was generally known that the death of the Empress Elizabeth was near at hand. It was more than suspected that the Voronzof family was urging Peter, on his accession, to divorce Catherine, declare Paul illegitimate, and marry Elizabeth Voronzof. But Peter's fervent admiration for Frederick the Great and love of Prussia alarmed not only the pro-Austrian party but a great number of others, who did not wish to see the complete reversal of previous policy which was bound to follow Peter's eleva-

tion to the throne. Some went so far as to advocate that Paul should be declared Emperor, with Catherine as his guardian, Peter being driven into exile. Count Panin (who, succeeding Bestujef as tutor to Paul, had already succeeded to much of his political influence) was supposed to be averse from extreme measures against Peter and to prefer the idea of an association of Catherine on the throne with Peter. He is said to have brought about a kind of reconciliation between Elizabeth, on her death-bed, and her nephew. The Empress, at any rate, died without disinheriting Peter in favour of Paul, for whom she showed all signs of a passionate attachment in her last years. She may have thought of Catherine as regent during the child's minority, as Catherine was in greater favour since the events of 1759. But she died without expressing any such wish, and Peter succeeded in the natural way.

THE REVOLUTION OF 1762

CHAPTER III

THE REVOLUTION OF 1762

According to what the Princess Dashkof told Diderot when in later years she visited Paris, less than forty-eight hours before the death of the Empress Elizabeth, the whole Court was split up into four sections, all jealously watching one another, and all anxious to get Catherine out of the way, and to marry Peter to a wife of their own choice. Every avenue was watched by spies; but by rising from her bed, and making her way over the snow to the Palace where Catherine was sleeping, the Princess managed to get a few hours' conversation with her. She began by asking Catherine what plans she had formed.

"You are either an angel or a demon," exclaimed the young Empress.

"Neither," replied the Princess Dashkof; "but Elizabeth is dead, and the question is: What are your resolutions?"

"To abandon myself to the course of events, since I am unable to direct them."

Diderot does not doubt the story. All that could make us hesitate to accept it is that the Princess was ever more of a heroine to herself than she appeared to others.

The Empress Elizabeth was largely responsible for the subsequent course of events. She had completed the ruin of her nephew's initially weak character by the humiliating state of bondage in which she kept him, which only allowed his ignobler vices free scope, while debarring him from learning how to rule. Her system did less harm to Catherine, but it forced her into intrigue, and made the breach between wife and husband irreparable. Elizabeth was, indeed, ill-suited as a guardian of future sovereigns. M. Waliszewski sums her up as *une névrosée*. The chief marks of her character were superstition—the grossest kind of superstition in her declining years; and voluptuousness, though she confined herself to very few favourites—Alexander Razumofsky in her earlier days, and the Shuvalofs towards the end. She was of striking personal beauty, according to all accounts; but D'Eon finds her outward appearance that of a mask. All writers dwell on her heavy drinking. Wroughton declares that she "died a victim to her

own excesses, and almost with a saucer of cherry-brandy at her lips." Dipsomania was not unknown among monarchs of the East in those days. The Princess Dashkof recalls having read a letter addressed to Catherine I. by the Persian Shah of her time, in which he wrote: "I hope, my well-beloved sister, that God has not made thee love strong drink. I who write to thee have eyes like rubies, a nose like a carbuncle, and cheeks inflamed with burning fire; and, owing to this unfortunate propensity, I am forced to waste my days and nights on a bed of misery." It must be allowed to the credit of Catherine II. that she was altogether free from such a reproach.

Peter's short reign of six months was marked by considerable activity in the domestic affairs of Russia, and that activity was all in the direction of reform. This record is curious from one whom most writers of the period agreed in looking on as almost imbecile. Peter was thirty-four years old when he came to the throne, and he had spent twenty of those years in the galling bondage imposed on him by his aunt Elizabeth, who allowed him no more, but rather less, freedom as a man than he had as a

child. She had thought him a fool, and treated him as such. No one can have expected good from his accession except the Voronzof party, and what good they looked for was their own. Yet he was hardly on the throne when he commenced to carry out a series of progressive measures. He freed the nobility from the necessity imposed on them by Peter the Great of devoting themselves to the service of the State, leaving it to their "zeal and love for their sovereign." He abolished the Secret Chancery, that court worse than the Spanish Inquisition, as it was described to be. The exiles of Elizabeth's reign were recalled, including Bestujef, the two Birons, Marshal Münich, Madame Lapukhin, and others. Peter's religious changes were twofold. He continued the first Peter's plan of resuming monastic property, giving pecuniary compensation to the dispossessed; and he brought back the *raskolniks*, those unfortunate heretics who for their reforming zeal had been persecuted by the Orthodox Elizabeth, and driven out in thousands; Peter said, in his ukase, that Mohammedans, and even idolaters, were tolerated in Russia, while the *raskolniks* were at least Christians. These religious measures, however,

naturally gave offence to the Orthodox party, and he further flouted their feelings by his obvious contempt for the national faith. He had never been a true convert from Lutheranism, and he particularly disgusted the Russians by his irreverence over Elizabeth's funeral ceremonies. The Princess Dashkof describes him at the lying-in-state laughing and whispering with the Court ladies, ridiculing the priests, and abusing the sentries on duty. He could not have furnished a greater contrast to his wife's scrupulous attention to Orthodox duties.

His Prussian sympathies were still more unpopular, and, indeed, damned him beyond redemption. His foreign policy was what was to be expected of a prince who wore in a ring the portrait of Frederick, and one of his first acts was to make peace with the King of Prussia, who was at the time almost beaten to his knees by the combination of Austria and Russia against him. Frederick was said to have been willing to surrender East Prussia to the Russians as the price of peace, but Peter generously restored to him all Prussian territory held by Russia, and proceeded to form with him an offensive and defensive alliance, celebrating it by a grand banquet, at which he toasted

"The King, our Master," and expressed his willingness, at Frederick's bidding, to "make war on hell with all the Russian Empire." New Prussian uniforms were introduced for the Russian army, and Prussian drill methods were adopted, while Elizabeth's bodyguard was abolished. In the Court he made the German curtsey compulsory. His private life was spent in the company of beer-drinking and tobacco-smoking friends (it is curious that his indulgence in bouts of tobacco is so frequently alluded to with scorn), while his devotion to Elizabeth Voronzof, Catherine's "Madame de Pompadour," redoubled. The French Minister, Breteuil, is astonished at his strange taste. "She has no wit, and it is impossible to imagine anything uglier than her face. She is in every way like a servant at a low inn." It must, however, be stated that Saldern, who was Russian Minister at several European Courts, and had written a book specially to contradict Rulhière's account of the 1762 Revolution and to set his late master right in the world's eyes, finds Elizabeth Voronzof sweet and amiable, and a far fitter mate for his good, noble, and generous Prince than was the "vicious being, dominated by an ambition beyond all measure, and abandoned to

the most excessive profligacy"—Catherine. The weight of authority is all against Saldern's view, but it should at least be recorded. It would have been hard even for Saldern to defend Peter's public attitude toward his wife, since he not merely neglected her but insulted her before the Court, and before foreign representatives, on the occasion of the Prussian celebrations, openly calling her a "fool" at table. Catherine bore the mortification with no more than a few tears, which she could not keep back. But she had not long to wait now. Her party was strong, and ready as soon as she chose to head it. The army, too, was ready, and the public — such public as there was in Russia in those days—had no sympathy for Peter in spite of his reforms. His good actions were outweighed by his personal character and his foreign leanings. When he made up his mind to go to war with Denmark over Holstein affairs he precipitated his fall.

A very remarkable person comes into Catherine's story in the early days of 1762—one who played in the Revolution of that year a part of which it is difficult to estimate the greatness. In her own Memoirs the Princess Dashkof assigns herself the leading role, and the French

attaché, Rulhière, whose superior, Baron de Breteuil, was certainly implicated, at least financially, in the plot, gives her the largest share at the beginning, though stating that later Gregory Orlof became the effective chief, while appearing to be the Princess's agent to soothe her vanity. On the other hand, Frederick the Great summed up the matter by saying that the Orlofs did everything; the Princess Dashkof was "nothing more than the silly fly buzzing on the wheel." Catherine is scornful about the Dashkof claims. "She asserted that all went through her to get to me," wrote the Empress in the August following the Revolution, "yet for six months I was in correspondence with all the leaders before she heard the first name. It is true that she has plenty of spirit, but she is spoiled by her monstrous ostentation and her naturally meddlesome nature." Catherine heard that one of the Shuvalofs had written to Voltaire telling him that "a woman of nineteen years had changed the government of Russia"; she desired Poniatowsky (to whom her letter of August was addressed) to "undeceive the great writer." Plainly there was some bitterness between Catherine and the Princess by then. The reason will appear.

The Princess Dashkof was by birth the youngest of the Voronzof sisters—daughters of Count Roman Voronzof, a member of the Senate, and nieces of the Grand Chancellor, Count Michael, who was married to a first cousin of the Empress Elizabeth. Catherine the Little, as she afterwards called herself in jesting distinction from her friend the Empress, was not brought up with her sisters but at her uncle's house—in consequence of which she received a much better training, chiefly on the French lines then almost universal among the more educated Russians of the period. The eldest sister, Mary, had married Count Buturlin. The second, Elizabeth, was the favourite of Peter and his wife's maid-of-honour. Catherine Romanovna was born in 1744, and, owing to the high standing of her family, was held at the font by the Empress Elizabeth herself, while the Grand Duke Peter was her godfather. She seems to have been hardly more of a beauty than her sister Elizabeth, for Diderot, when she called on him in Paris, found her by no means handsome: "little, with a high and open forehead, large puffed-out cheeks, eyes neither large nor small, sunk a little in the sockets, dark hair and eyebrows, a rather flat nose, a round, straight

neck of the national shape, wide chest, not much figure." Her mind impressed him more favourably, it is just to add.

Catherine Voronzof's first meeting with the future Empress was in the winter of 1758-59. The description in the Dashkof Memoirs is so delightfully sententious that it may be quoted in full. Peter and the Grand Duchess, afterwards named with so great propriety Catherine the Great, came to spend an evening at her uncle's house, she explains. "I had already been represented to Her Imperial Highness, by many of my uncle's visitors, as a young person who spent almost her whole time in study, and was otherwise spoken of in such favourable terms as their partiality suggested. The esteem with which she afterwards honoured me resulted from a prepossession of this nature, and inspired an enthusiasm and devotedness in return which carried me into a sphere of action I then so little contemplated or aspired to, and more or less influenced the rest of my life. At the time of which I am speaking I may venture to assert there were not two women in the Empire, except the Grand Duchess and myself, who occupied themselves at all in serious reading; hence was a point of mutual attraction; and, as the graces

of her manner were absolutely irresistible to all whom she chose to please, what must have been their effect on a young creature like myself, scarcely fifteen years of age, and so susceptible of their power?" The "young creature," whose favourite authors were Bayle, Montesquieu, Boileau, and Voltaire, and who sat up reading them so late at nights as to injure her health, seems really to have made an impression on Catherine, seeing how intimate they became two or three years later. But Catherine Voronzof was married, when next they met, to Prince Dashkof, of whom she always writes in her Memoirs with the utmost devotion. Rulhière has an absurd tale of how "the young Woronsof," then fifteen, being addressed by "Prince D'Ashekof, one of the handsomest noblemen about the Court," in a style of gallantry somewhat peculiar, called Count Michael, and said: "Uncle, Prince D'Ashekof is now doing me the honour to propose marriage to me." Rulhière adds that "the young man, not daring to acknowledge to the first personage in the Empire that the proposition which he had made to his niece did not precisely amount to this, married her, but sent her to Moscow, two hundred leagues off." Rulhière's pretty fancy

seems to have been at work again. In her old age, when, at the persuasion of her young and admiring English friend, Miss Wilmot, the Princess Dashkof compiled her Memoirs, she complains, in a dedicatory letter, of the tissue of falsehoods and vile imputations fabricated by French writers against the great Catherine, and says: "In such works I have found your Dashkaw represented with all the vices most foreign to her character—sometimes as a person of the most criminal ambition, at others as one abandoned to the greatest profligacy." She certainly did not merit such treatment. But, in spite of the enthusiastic praise by her friend and editor, Mrs Bradford (formerly Miss Wilmot), of the Princess's "singleness of purpose, candour, and plain-dealing," "absence of pretension," her "honest soul," "true heart, and humour so playful and ready to be pleased," we cannot find much admiration except for the literary talents of this "French-speaking Tomyris." The Comte de Ségur, a most acute observer, speaks of her "cutting and haughty disposition, ill suited to the character of Catherine," and says that "this proud woman seems to have been formed by an error of nature; she partook more of our sex than of her own." He was writing in 1787,

when the Princess Dashkof came but rarely to the Hermitage. But his verdict seems borne out by Catherine's coolness to her and by the opinions of others.

However, "the young creature" had not developed such unpleasant traits yet, and in the summer of 1761 Catherine cultivated her acquaintance, meeting her regularly, and inviting her to her home to discuss literature and philosophy. The bond between the two Catherines became firm, and it was natural that in 1762 the Princess should be ready to take part in any scheme for her friend's advantage. It is probable, too, that a certain amount of jealousy of her sister Elizabeth, whom her family wished to see in the place of Catherine beside Peter, contributed to her attitude. The Voronzofs, apart from the Princess Dashkof, certainly stood to gain all by the degradation of Catherine and to lose by Peter's fall. And a scheme was on foot to bring about the former event. Saldern does not hesitate to admit that Peter had in his mind, and had, indeed, confided to Elizabeth Voronzof, his intention of making her Empress. Saldern describes Peter's mistress as of so open and simple a nature that she thought it a pleasing

duty to tell her sister of the high fortune awaiting her and hers. The Princess Dashkof, he continues, too ambitious to bear the thought of seeing her sister one day her sovereign, revealed the plan to Catherine, and gladly embarked with her in a plot of which she thought herself the head, not knowing that an Orlof had made himself the leader already. Peter's apologist evidently thinks the Emperor quite justified in his designs against one whom he describes as concealing under an exterior full of charms a soul worthy of the furies of hell; whereas the Princess Dashkof's adherence to her friend's cause rather than to that of her sister, with whom she had not been brought up, and of whom she had seen little (and nothing of that little to like), was the basest treachery.

Were there no guide as to the comparative value of the numerous accounts of the Revolution of 1762, it would, indeed, be difficult to apportion the responsibility or even make sure of the details. Fortunately, there is extant the letter, already mentioned, from Catherine herself to Stanislas Poniatowsky. This was written five weeks after the success of the plot had seated her on the throne of Russia. The narrative is clear, and, if we make allowance

for some suppressions through a desire to stand well in the eyes of him to whom she wrote, seems worthy of trust. Her personal share, it may be observed, appears from this to have been larger than Frederick the Great imagined it. He told the Comte de Ségur that to Catherine could be imputed neither the honour nor the crime of the Revolution ; she was young, powerless, isolated, and a foreigner, on the point of being divorced and shut up for life. Frederick (who had his agents at the Russian Court from whom to draw his information) assigned the work to the Orlofs, as has been said. We need not, then, pay much attention to the Princess Dashkof's story about the original starting-point of the plot, which she sees in a quarrel arising between her husband and Peter over an alleged mistake made by the former on parade. Prince Dashkof was persuaded to accept a mission to Constantinople to get him out of harm's way. "My mind," continues his wife, "had long been occupied with the contemplation of those dangers which, through the ruling power, seemed to threaten the best interests of our country. . . . One prevailing idea haunted my imagination, and led me, as if by inspiration, to believe that the

period of a revolution was not far distant." And she resolved, she says, to share the difficulties and danger. She began to devote herself earnestly to the matter. "As soon as my ideas on the means of a well-organised conspiracy became in some measure definite and consistent I directed my attention towards gaining over to our views, and implicating, if possible, in our designs, some of those persons whose consideration and influence in the State might at least afford a sanction to our enterprise." It should be added that, though there is no hesitation in the Princess's claim here to the foremost place in starting the plot, she gave a more modest account to Diderot.[1] The

[1] Diderot says that the Princess Dashkof, as far as any merit was concerned in producing the Revolution, "disclaimed every pretension to it, both on her own part and on that of others. It was brought about, she said, by an imperceptible clue, which she and all had imperceptibly followed, and, if there were anyone who could be named as giving a positive impulse to this adventure, it would be no other than Peter the Third himself through his extravagances, his vices, his incapacity, and the scorn and disgust which his low-lived and scandalous habits had excited throughout the nation. Everyone was hurried on towards the same end by the general voice; and so little was there of concern in the proceeding that the affair was very far advanced before she, or the Empress, or any other person had any suspicion of the result which was at hand." We must, however, allow her the credit of influencing some of those implicated in the

Dashkof Memoirs were not written until she was sixty-three, and had grown, perhaps, to dwell more fondly on her achievements in the past. We may turn to what Catherine herself has to say.

In her letter of the 2nd of August she tells Poniatowsky that it was on the day of the celebration of the peace with the King of Prussia—*i.e.* the 22nd of May—that she first lent ear to the proposals made to her ever since the death of the Empress Elizabeth. By whom these proposals had been made she does not say; it is reasonable to guess the Orlofs. Peter had already lost what wits he had. He was scheming to change his religion to Lutheranism once more, as well as to marry Elizabeth Voronzof after repudiating and im-

plot or aware of it at least. Count Panin and Prince Repnin were both connections of hers with whom she had weight. Panin, her husband's uncle by Russian reckoning, was attached to her, and so, by the amiable scandal of the day, was variously accused of being her lover or her father; Rulhière seizes on the latter suggestion, willing to clear the Princess, but not to miss a chance for an insinuation against someone. Both accusations are apparently quite groundless. "This really respectable old uncle," as the Princess Dashkof calls him once, seems to have already contemplated the idea of Peter's deposition in favour of Paul, with Catherine as regent and himself as chief adviser. But he wished to be sure of success.

prisoning Catherine. On the day of the peace celebration, however, he publicly insulted his wife, and, further, gave directions for her arrest in the evening. Through the influence of Prince George of Holstein, Peter's uncle, the order was countermanded. Catherine could waver no longer. There was a plan, of which she was cognisant, to seize the Emperor in his private rooms, and shut him up, as had been done to the Empress Anne and her children. But Peter went off to Oranienbaum with Elizabeth Voronzof, leaving Catherine at Peterhof. This gave the conspiracy time to develop, though its actual coming to fruit was forced by an accident. Catherine writes:

"The fate of the plot was in the hands of the three brothers Orlof, the eldest of whom Osten remembers seeing follow me everywhere, and commit a thousand follies; his passion for me was public property, and he did everything to that end. They are very determined people, and much loved by the common soldiers, having served in the Guards. I am under the greatest obligation to these people; all Petersburg is witness to this. The minds of the Guards were prepared, and, finally, there were thirty or forty officers and about ten thousand men in the

plot. In all this number there was not one traitor during a period of three weeks. There were four separate factions, whose leaders were united by us for the execution of the plan, and the real secret was in the three brothers' hands. Panin wished it to be in favour of my son, but they would never consent to it. I was at Peterhof; Peter the Third was living and drinking at Oranienbaum. It was agreed that in case of treachery his return should not be awaited, but that the Guards should be called together, and I proclaimed. Their zeal for me did what treachery would have brought about. A rumour was current on the 27th that I had been arrested. The soldiers were thrown into tumult; one of our officers quieted them. A soldier came to one Captain Pasik, the head of one faction, and told him for certain that I was lost. Pasik assured him that he had news of me. The soldier, in his concern for me, went to another officer, and told him the same story. This officer was not in the plot and, alarmed at hearing that an officer had sent the soldier away without putting him under arrest, went to the Major, who arrested Pasik, and sent a report during the night to Oranienbaum. All the regiment was up, and

the alarm was spread among our conspirators. They resolved at once to send the second of the brothers Orlof to bring me into the town, while the other two went about everywhere to say that I had come."

Catherine goes on to say that she was almost alone at Peterhof with her waiting-women, forgotten, to all appearance, by the world. But she was kept informed of what was going on, both for and against her, and was, therefore, in a state of great anxiety. "On the 28th, at six in the morning, Alexis Orlof entered my room, woke me, and said very calmly: 'It is time to get up; all is ready for your proclamation.' I asked him for details. He said: 'Pasik is arrested.' I dressed myself as quickly as possible, without making a toilet, and got into the carriage which he had brought. Another officer was at the door, disguised as a valet, and a third rode in front to some versts' distance from Peterhof. At five versts from the town I met the eldest Orlof with young Prince Baratinsky. The latter gave me his place, for my horses were finished, and we proceeded to the barracks of the Ismailofsky regiment. Here were only twelve men, and a drummer, who started to beat the alarm. Then

the soldiers arrived, and began to kiss me, to embrace my feet, my hands, my dress, and to call me their saviour." A priest was brought, and the men swore allegiance to their new sovereign at once, after which all proceeded to the Simeonofsky regiment's barracks, where a similar scene was witnessed. Catherine drove on to the Kazan Church, followed by the two regiments shouting *Vivat!* and here the Preobazinsky regiment joined them, shouting like its comrades, and begging Catherine's pardon for being the last to arrive. Its officers had tried to hold the men back, but the latter had brought four of them under arrest. The Horse Guards had already risen in her favour, making a prisoner of their hated commander, Prince George of Holstein, and pillaging his house. Catherine saved his life, and later sent him to administer his native Holstein for her. Assured of her military supporters the Empress proceeded to the new Winter Palace, where she met the Synod and the Senate, and arranged for the hasty drawing up of a manifesto and the oath of allegiance. Once more back with the troops, she passed round, on foot, more than forty thousand men, received with cries of joy everywhere, which were echoed by

the crowds standing round, according to Catherine. A meeting followed at the old Winter Palace, at which it was decided that the troops, with Catherine at their head, should march to Peterhof, where Peter was expected to dine that day. Before they started the Vice-Chancellor Voronzof arrived to reproach Catherine for her flight from Peterhof that morning, and Prince Trubetzkoi and Count Alexander Shuvalof to secure the troops, and to put her to death, she says. Her answer was the same to all three; they were taken to the church, and the oath of allegiance was administered. No violence was used, not even to their feelings, it would appear.

It was ten o'clock at night when Catherine started for Peterhof, having proclaimed herself Colonel of the Guards amid a scene of great enthusiasm, and having attired herself in their uniform—the old uniform introduced by Peter the Great, it is to be noted, for the Guards had already cast aside the new uniforms copied by Peter III. from Frederick's army. She rode on horseback at the head of the troops, the Princess Dashkof, according to her account, riding beside her, also in Guard's uniform, and looking like a boy of fifteen. Catherine rode

astride, as she always preferred to do, and had done for years at Oranienbaum, when she could do so without attracting the notice of the Empress Elizabeth.[1] The march continued all night. On the way two messages arrived from Peter—one, "very flattering," by the hands of Prince Alexander Galitzin, which Catherine ignored; the second brought by General Michael Ismailof, who promised to secure Peter's abdication. Catherine sent him to do so. The task was accomplished in the morning. Catherine comments thus:

"Peter the Third renounced his Empire at Oranienbaum in full liberty, surrounded by five hundred Holsteiners, and came with Elizabeth Voronzof, Gudovitch, and Michael Ismailof to Peterhof, where I assigned him a bodyguard of five officers and a few soldiers. It was noon on the 29th of June, St Peter's Day." Catherine's dates are Old Style, it must be noticed.

After an interval for a meal, during which, she says, the soldiers grew so alarmed at not seeing her that they began to imagine she was being persuaded into a reconciliation with Peter, and insisted on her coming out and reassuring

[1] Catherine rode "like a true gentleman," the Memoirs say.

them, Catherine decided to send the late Emperor to Ropsha, which she describes as "a remote but pleasant place" twenty-seven versts from St Petersburg, until suitable apartments could be prepared for him at Schlüsselburg, on Lake Ladoga. Alexis Orlof, with four other officers and a detachment of men, was sent to look after him. What followed is narrated by Catherine, in her letter to Poniatowsky, in a cold-blooded manner, to excuse which it is necessary to keep in mind the bitterness caused by his treatment of her. After telling how she designed to send Peter to Schlüsselburg she remarks that *le bon Dieu en disposa autrement.* Peter had a violent attack of colic for three days, which stopped on the fourth. On that day he drank heavily, for he had all he wished for except liberty. Still, he had asked her for nothing except his mistress, his dog, his negro, and his violin, but, fearing scandal and an increase in the *fermentation d'esprits*, she only sent him the three last. Violent colic recurred, with a determination to the head. He was two days in this state, after which great weakness followed, and, despite medical assistance, he gave up the ghost, asking for a Lutheran priest. She feared the officers might have poisoned

him, so much was he hated, and she had an examination of the body made. There was no trace of poison. . . . A stroke of apoplexy had carried him off. His heart was of extremely small size, and was withered (*flétri*).

In the proclamation which she issued when Peter's death was made public Catherine gives the same cause, adding medical details which we may omit. But the almost universal belief, both at the time and in later writers' works, was that the deposed Emperor was assassinated. Alexis Orlof was generally accused of the crime, some associating with him Pasik and Baratinsky. Others made Tieplof the culprit. If the death was unnatural probabilities point to Alexis Orlof as the author of it; a story which may be true in this connection is mentioned at the end of the next chapter. But all elaborate accounts of a piteous strangling or poisoning scene, such as a few writers furnish, may be dismissed as fictitious. If Orlof or another did kill Peter the deed was accomplished without witnesses. Peter was a weakling, whom it could not be difficult to put out of existence.

If there was murder done Catherine's knowledge or ignorance becomes of great importance

in an estimate of her character. Only those could make the deed her design who held with Saldern's editor that she was aptly described in Voltaire's line:

"Le ciel est dans ses yeux, l'enfer est dans son cœur."

But this does not seem to have been the view at the time, and there was less popular outcry than over the death of Ivan two years later. Peter's image remained in the hearts of the peasantry, as Pugatshef, the false Peter, found to his advantage in 1773. They did not rise, however, in indignation against Catherine in 1762 or denounce her as her husband's murderess. The Prince de Ligne took pains to establish Catherine's complete innocence, and questioned the Emperor's old servants at Oranienbaum, whose perfect liberty to tell what occurred strikes him as the best possible proof of Catherine's total ignorance of the deed. Apparently, he writes, she does not know that the crime is imputed to her (this could hardly be quite correct); and, after mentioning how her detractors added crime on crime as hers, such as the deaths of Ivan, of Paul's first wife, of Patiomkin, he concludes: "The lies of lackeys, or of souls as base, have endeavoured

to dim the lustre of that immortal reign. . . . One only needed to see the Empress, to listen to her, to know her life-story, to be sure of her goodness, justice, and unvarying kindness." This is excessive; but the Prince de Ligne, though a partisan, is anything but a simpleton. His view in the matter of Peter's death is in effect that of every trustworthy judge contemporary with Catherine. The accusation against her of ordering her husband's assassination is only put forward by the scandalous, the disreputable, or the utterly prejudiced.

The possibility still remains that Peter was slain entirely without her knowledge but that she condoned the deed when it was done. Certainly she made no attempt to punish anyone. She was satisfied with the post-mortem examination which she mentions to Poniatowsky, and took no steps to reassure a hesitating public, while she forbade any discussion of the event. Her manner on receipt of the news, which Alexis Orlof brought to St Petersburg as fast as he could ride on the day the death occurred, was against her. She was just about to make her appearance at Court. She appeared there with a tranquil air, but immediately after shut herself up with Orlof, Panin, and others, to

deliberate whether the Senate and people should be told at once. It was determined to wait a day, and Catherine, after dining as usual, held an evening Court. Next day the news was made known as Catherine sat at table, whereon she rose, with her eyes full of tears, as though she had but just heard, dismissed those sitting at the meal with her, shut herself up, and for several days showed signs of profound grief. This is Tooke's or Castera's account, and there seems no reason to doubt its correctness. In the proclamation announcing Peter's death from violent colic she bade her people pray sincerely to God for the repose of Peter's soul, but asked them to consider this unexpected and sudden death as "an especial effect of the providence of God, whose impenetrable decrees are working, for us, for our throne, and for our country, things known only to His holy will."

The natural conclusion from the evidence appears to be that Catherine did not either order or consent to Peter's removal, but that when he died, probably by foul means, she accepted the situation, and did not institute too minute an inquiry, which, though it would clear her of all suspicion, might necessitate the

punishment of one or more whom she could not afford to punish. She published a version of her husband's end which could not be disproved (and cannot now be demonstrated false), made a decent show of a grief which we cannot expect her to have felt, and for the rest, imposed a silence, as far as possible, on discussion. Thereby she gave the scandalmongers a handle, but preserved her throne. If we cannot consider Voltaire's verdict sufficient: "I know that she is reproached with some trifles about her husband, but these are family affairs with which I do not meddle"—we must allow full weight at least to all arguments from her position. Her strategy was the only strategy which could insure her victory in a situation of immense difficulty and danger.

Peter's body was exposed to public view[1] for three days in the monastery of Saint Alexander Nefsky, and was buried on the 21st of July, the day on which he intended to march against Denmark. Neither proper tomb nor inscription was his until the accession of his son Paul, who exhumed the body, and rendered to it the same honours as to his just dead mother. He, further, crowned

[1] According to some it was black, pointing to poison.

the coffin, as Peter was never crowned in his lifetime.

It is only a devotee like Saldern, or the friend who edited Saldern's work after the deaths of both the writer and Catherine, who can see in Peter III. "a monarch worthy of being loved" and "a prince full of goodness and humanity." It is not hard for them to demolish the stories of the untrustworthy Rulhière, who would make Peter an utter imbecile. Saldern's editor points to the way in which Peter successfully threw off his wife's domination, as soon as the Empress Elizabeth died, to prove that he could not be merely imbecile. And, indeed, the opening acts of his reign were not those of a madman, but he was certainly "streaked with insanity." The combination of a sickly constitution, education under a brutal and ignorant tutor, the treatment of a child applied to a grown man, and a taste for strong drink, acquired at the age of ten and developed into almost daily drunkenness from twenty-five onward—such a combination could but produce one result if it did not bring death. His insanity might have taken more serious forms than a devotion to toys after his marriage, executions of rats for eating his sentries, absurd military exercises for his household, or an

appearance at his wife's bedside, just before her second child-birth, drunk, in Holstein uniform, booted, spurred, and girt with a huge sword. It might have driven him to worse than the courtship of very unprepossessing ladies, and beer-swilling all day till he was carried to bed drunk. As it was, his orgies completed his ruin slowly, and he showed vestiges of intelligence at thirty-four. When his wife declared that he lost what wits he had after his accession she was referring chiefly to his political measures. Her language, on the whole, betrays remarkably little bitterness at the long martyrdom of her marriage with him. For a high-spirited woman she showed great toleration of a constant series of outrages, and she never refused to be for him *Madame la Ressource*; she was merely callous over his death. His other relations were not so sparing of Peter in their speech. To Anna Ivanovna he was *le diablotin*; to his aunt Elizabeth "my damned fool of a nephew." His aunt's Court followed their mistress's example: they ridiculed or hated him. The Voronzofs made all the use they could of him, but only Elizabeth was with him until Catherine sent her away. Old Marshal Münich was prepared to fight for him. But Peter "let himself be dethroned as a child

is sent to bed," in the words of Frederick the Great. His poor, degraded life seemed to have served for little but to introduce Catherine to the throne of Russia.[1]

The news of Peter's death reached Catherine at St Petersburg on the 18th of July. After arranging on the 10th for his conveyance from Peterhof to Ropsha she had started for the capital once more, travelling with the troops, and snatching a little over two hours' sleep on the way, on a bed in the Kurakins' country house, fully dressed except for her boots, which one of the soldiers removed for her. Arriving in St Petersburg she went to the Summer Palace to receive the Court, the Synod, with her young son and others, and thence to the cathedral to hear mass and a Te Deum service. "Then," she writes, "they came to congratulate me, who, since six on Friday morning, had hardly drunk, eaten, or slept. I was, indeed, glad to get to bed on Sunday night." But scarcely had she sunk

[1] The Princess Dashkof sums up as follows the character of "this ill-fated Prince, whom nature had formed for the lowest walks of life, and whom fortune had placed on a throne":—"Although not positively vicious, his weakness of parts, his want of education, and his natural bias to everything base and demeaning, might have proved in their consequences, had he continued to govern, no less pernicious to his people than habits of the most deliberate vice."

to sleep at midnight when Captain Pasik appeared at her bedside, and woke her, saying that the men were drunk, and believed that three thousand Prussians were on their way to carry off their "mother." They were on their way to the Palace, and must see her, listening neither to their officers nor to the Orlofs. The weary "mother" arose, and went out to meet them. She assured them that she was well, that they must sleep and let her sleep, as she had not slept for three days, and that they must listen to their officers in future. They began to talk about "the cursed Prussians" and to protest their willingness to die for her. "Well, I thank you," she replied; "but go to bed!" Catherine showed an admirable grasp of the situation. The men went like lambs, she writes, and next day they came and apologised for having disturbed her.

In this manner was consummated what the Princess Dashkof calls a "glorious revolution brought about without a plan." She could but see the hand of Divine Providence in it. Here she followed the lead of her Imperial mistress. Catherine, after confessing to Poniatowsky that all took place under her own particular direction, adds: "God has brought all to the end which He proposed; and it was more like a miracle than

a foreseen and prearranged affair, for so many lucky combinations cannot come together save by the orders of the Almighty." The actual revolution was, indeed, startlingly brief. Keith, the English Minister at St Petersburg at the time, says that it was over in two hours, without a drop of blood shed.

The victory was not abused, apart from the treatment which Peter received. Among those who appeared at Catherine's first levee were the Voronzof family, who had planned her ruin. "Madame, pardon my family!" cried the Princess Dashkof as she saw them kneeling before the Empress. "You know I have sacrificed them to you." Catherine extended her hand for them to kiss. While she pardoned all Peter's adherents she was lavish in rewards to her own, giving titles, honours, and money broadcast. It was estimated that she paid out 800,000 roubles in cash alone in five months, 50,000 going to Gregory Orlof. It was not to be expected that she could satisfy all. The Princess Dashkof, in particular, is said to have pressed for the reward of a colonelcy in the Preobazinsky Guards, whereon Catherine answered, with an ironical smile, that the Academy would suit her better than a military

corps. She did, in fact, appoint the Princess president of the Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1782—an appointment of which Casanova remarks that the members of the Academy recognised in their president another Minerva or they would have blushed to have a woman at their head.

But a sudden shock befell the Princess Dashkof in the midst of her hopes. This is how she describes it. On the evening of Peter's deposition she entered the Palace, looking for Catherine, and proceeded to the Empress's own apartments. "What was my astonishment at beholding Gregory Orlof stretched at full length on a sofa in one of the rooms (having hurt his leg, it appeared) with a large packet of letters before him, which he was in the act of opening, and which I recognised to be some State papers. . . . I asked him, in amazement, what he was about. 'The Empress has ordered that I should open them,' was his answer." It was useless her protesting that this was impossible, and she received a worse shock when, having been invited by the Empress to dinner, she perceived, "with extreme disapprobation," the dining-table which was laid for three, drawn towards the couch where Orlof lay.

It may be observed in passing, as an example of Rulhière's trustworthiness, that his version of this story makes the Princess, entering the apartments of the Empress with a liberty rather too familiar, perceive with astonishment "Orlof on a long chair, with his leg uncovered, and the Empress herself dressing a contusion on that leg." The Princess thereon used her freedom to expostulate with Catherine on such an excess of kindness, and soon afterwards, on seeing clearly how the case stood, assumed the tone of a severe censor.

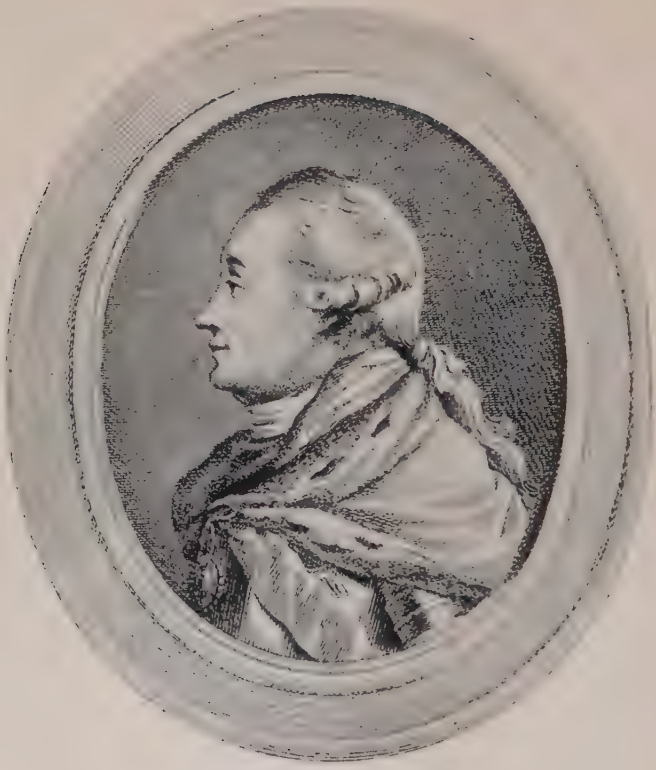
The Princess Dashkof, though she did not use her freedom to expostulate, as Rulhière says, at least showed her feelings on her countenance, and had to put off the Empress's question what was the matter by replying that it was only "loss of sleep for fifteen nights." When Catherine further pressed her to join in remonstrances against Orlof's expressed wish to give up military service, she dryly observed that, Catherine having as sovereign so many means of rewarding him besides promoting him in the army, there was no need to do violence to his wishes. "A conviction now for the first time forced itself on my mind," say her Memoirs, "fraught with every idea that was painful and

humiliating. It was evident that there was a *liaison* between them." And, in fact, what the Princess Dashkof had witnessed was, in M. Waliszewski's words, the inauguration of favouritism.

Gregory Orlof was the first official favourite of the Empress Catherine's reign, and it was in this reign that the position of favourite acquired a new character. There was not, perhaps, so much difference, as historians would make out, between the positions of Biron under Anna Ivanovna and of such as Patiomkin under Catherine. Russia, indeed, felt the *Bironovstchina* more than the influence of the most political of Catherine's favourites. But where Catherine made a new departure was that she gave the favourite a definite status, with salary, and rooms in the Palace, not hiding the fact in any way from her Court or subjects — which makes Masson say that she must, indeed, have known and despised the Russians. But the Russians were accustomed to the sight of the *vremienstchik*, "the man of the moment," for had not, since the death of Peter the Great in 1725, a succession of women occupied the Russian throne? What was new to them was the number of favourites and the candour which

the Empress showed about their position. The mere fact of her laxity of morals could hardly shock her subjects much. The age was certainly not one of close attention to outward decency, and Russia was, among European countries, the last rather than the first in such respects. For a scathing picture of the Slav woman of his day—and the Slav lady, be it observed—the reader may be referred to the pages of Masson's "Mémoires Sécrets." Masson, if sensational and as fond of scandal as most of his contemporaries, had at least excellent opportunities of seeing Russian life during his long exile from France.

THE ORLOF ASCENDANCY



Gregory Orloff.

CHAPTER IV

THE ORLOF ASCENDANCY

CATHERINE, when her reign began, found herself in a very difficult position. She was surrounded by those to whom she owed her position on the throne, who had risked their lives for her, and who looked to her to reward them handsomely. The nobles, jealous of the sudden rise of the Orlofs and the other new men, and disgusted at the arrogance displayed by them, kept aloof from the Court. The late conspirators were not in themselves, for the most part, persons to inspire much confidence in a discerning ruler. The French Minister, Baron de Breteuil, sums them up as a poor lot, with the exception of Count Panin and the hetman Razumofsky. They were stupid, he says, and, though stupidity was common enough in those around her, and was apparently tolerated by her easily enough, he could not persuade himself that Catherine would not thin them out in time. So, indeed, she did, but with no undue haste; and the Orlof influence, which was little

used on the side of enlightenment, was destined to last long. At first Gregory Orlof was practically master; had he been a man of stronger will-power he might have made himself so as decidedly as Patiomkin afterwards. As it was, those whom he disliked, such as the Princess Dashkof (who in her turn cordially hated him), were soon out of favour with Catherine. Only the most powerful could hold their ground against him, such as Cyril Razumofsky, who, in reply to Orlof's boast to Catherine that it would only take him a month to dethrone her, said: "That may be, but we should have *you* hung in a week." Orlof presumably recognised the truth of this.

The question has been much discussed what were Catherine's real sentiments towards Gregory Orlof. How she could write of him we have already seen. It may be added that, in a letter to her philosopher friend Zimmermann, she spoke of "this unique and truly great man," and complained of the way in which his contemporaries misunderstood him. M. Waliszewski maintains that, on the contrary, these contemporaries were only too prone in judging him to let their verdicts be echoes of Catherine's passionate infatuation. The Rev.

W. Tooke — who did not, however, go to St Petersburg until 1774,[1] when Orlof had been supplanted—maintains that, even at the beginning of her reign, Catherine's attachment to Orlof arose more from policy than from affection. Tooke's evidence, of course, is only second-hand at the best on Catherine's early days, and he speaks several times elsewhere of her great attachment to Orlof. Of her early infatuation there can be no doubt. Breteuil gives a marked instance of it at some Court theatricals at the beginning of 1763, when Orlof was taking, rather unsuccessfully, the leading part in some play. Catherine was charmed at the performance, and constantly praised the beauty and dignity of the actor to the French and Austrian Ministers, her neighbours. Nor does the way in which she received the news of his death, nearly twenty years later, really seem to bear out M. Waliszewski's theory of an affectation of grief on her part.

Nevertheless, whatever may have been the strength of Catherine's love for Orlof, she was hardly infatuated enough to listen to a suggestion that she should marry him. Of ambition

[1] He was chaplain to the English factory at St Petersburg.

to take part in the government of Russia Orlof showed little—too little according to his Empress. But his scheme of marriage was too bold, and Catherine could not fail to see its dangers. Still, in her affection, and partly, no doubt, as M. Waliszewski contends, in fear of Gregory and the power of his united and reckless family of brothers, she put the question seriously before her Cabinet. Though only one adviser had courage to speak his reply was unhesitating. "The Empress can do as she pleases," said Panin, "but Madame Orlof can never be Empress of Russia." Panin was obviously right,[1] and Catherine had no desire to become Madame Orlof on the terms. Bestujef, however, who was, apparently, the original inspirer of Orlof's scheme (which he hoped would be to his own advantage, since Panin was a pronounced opponent of the Orlofs), was not beaten yet. An attempt was made to discover a precedent for Catherine, and the Grand Chancellor Voronzof was sent to Alexander Razumofsky, brother of the hetman, and the

[1] A note in Poniatowsky's Memoirs says that the Orlof marriage was opposed by the hetman Razumofsky, Voronzof, and others. These names he must have got from Catherine. It is strange Panin is not mentioned.

former favourite of the Empress Elizabeth, who now lived a retired life, devoting himself to religion. He was supposed to have documents proving his marriage to Elizabeth. The story is that, when Voronzof approached him, he took out a roll of parchment from his desk, thrust it in the fire, and answered that he had never been other than the very humble servant of Her Majesty the Empress Elizabeth, and desired to be no less than the very humble servant of the reigning Empress. Bestujef was reduced to his last resource. He organised a petition to Catherine, praying her to marry, in view of the danger to the succession through the ill-health of the Grand Duke Paul. The Princess Dashkof, ignoring the rest of the tale, makes Bestujef commence with a petition, which he took to Panin for signature; whereon, after an indignant protest, Panin drove off at once to Catherine, and warned her of her danger. Catherine, she says, disowned the authority of "the intriguing old man" Bestujef, and thanked Panin for his frankness and loyalty. The effect of the "piece of quackery," as the Princess Dashkof calls the petition, was rapid, at whatever period it was got up. Popular disturbances broke out against the marriage scheme, and even

went so far that Catherine's image was torn down from a triumphal arch in Moscow. Traces were discovered in May, 1763, of a conspiracy, supposed to implicate a number of people opposed to the Orlof family. Among these was the Princess Dashkof. A man named Hitrof or Hitrovo was arrested, and on examination gave as the names of his associates those of a number of the revolutionists who had but a year ago put Catherine on the throne. Tooke alleges that Catherine now wrote to the Princess Dashkof (who had for a time almost been in exile at Moscow through the Orlof influence), "lavishing on her the most tender epithets, the most advantageous promises, and the most seducive [*sic*] flatteries, conjuring her in the name of their long-standing friendship to reveal to her what she knew of the recent conspiracies, and assuring her of a free pardon for all concerned." The Princess's reply was: "Madame, I have heard nothing; but if I had heard anything I should take good care how I spoke of it. What is it that you require of me? That I should expire on a scaffold? I am ready to mount it." Catherine was astonished at so much haughtiness, Tooke adds. The Princess Dashkof herself does not bear out this version

of the affair. According to her, Hitrof, who was "one of the most disinterested of the conspirators against Peter the Third," was, like others, indignant at the insolence of Orlof's pretensions, and consequently anxious to see his downfall. The extent of his conspiracy was to plan a counter-petition to Bestujef's, urging Catherine not to marry Orlof. He had, as he confessed, called on the Princess three times to ask her advice, but without success as she was expecting the birth of a child, and was seeing no one. Nevertheless, Catherine wrote a letter, and sent it by the hand of Tieplof to Prince Dashkof, himself lying ill at the time, saying that she understood that his wife was using menacing language about her. Prince Dashkof tore the letter up, and sent the Empress a reply written "with the utmost spirit." To show that she was innocent and undismayed the Princess wrote to Catherine after the birth of her son, and reminded her of her promise to stand godmother to the infant. Catherine was present at the christening, and the incident ended, Hitrof alone suffering banishment.

Though the conspiracy succeeded to the extent of alarming the Orlofs sufficiently to induce

them to give up the marriage scheme, there was no visible lessening of their influence over Catherine, and Gregory, if he had not the title which he coveted, had the position as far as he chose to occupy it. The Empress heaped honours upon him until he was not only supreme over practically every department of the army, but also the head of the Colonisation Bureau, while receiving ten thousand roubles a month, and gifts of houses and of estates, with peasants to work upon them. He was, too, privileged always to wear in his button-hole a diamond-studded miniature of his mistress—a favour only conceded to Patiomkin and Zubof among his successors, and up to his time unheard of as an Empress's gift. The way in which he accepted Catherine's treatment of him did nothing to prove him the truly great man that she declared him. Indeed, he did little but squander his money, including that given him for use in the various offices which he held, and pass his time in idleness, putting aside all public duties which might be thrust on him. Towards the Empress personally his familiarity of manner was such that it was declared unparalleled in any country since the foundation of monarchy, and a French attaché at St Peters-

burg described him as "publicly taking liberties with his sovereign which, in polite society, a self-respecting mistress would not tolerate in her lover." If Catherine's love of contrast was strong, the difference between the manners of Stanislas Poniatowsky and Gregory Orlof must have had an undeniable piquancy for her.

It was probably the Orlof supremacy which kept alight the sparks of discontent which, during Catherine's early reign, continued to break out into the fire of actual revolt. In the year following the Hitrof attempt there occurred an incident, the origin of which was attributed to conspiracy, though the mystery of it remains unsolved to this day. Ivan, the son of Anna Leopoldovna, was still a prisoner at Schlüsselburg. Peter, when he came to the throne in 1762, had brought the unhappy youth, then twenty-one years of age, to St Petersburg; but Catherine recognised the danger of the presence, even as a half-witted captive, of one who had, if only for a few months during babyhood, been recognised as Tsar of Russia, and she accordingly sent him back to Schlüsselburg. A plot in his favour had been discovered in the October after her accession, and those implicated had been transported before their

plans could mature. She designed to put Ivan himself into a monastery.[1] But she was saved the trouble. In the month of September, 1764, Ivan was killed. It was said that an officer named Mirovitch, in the garrison at Schlüsselburg, induced some of his men to attempt to "free the Tsar." Ivan's personal guards thereon put him to death, having had instructions on no account to permit his escape. Mirovitch was promptly arrested, and executed, without having uttered a word implicating anyone. No effort was made to trace any accomplices, and all discussion of the affair was forbidden. Nevertheless, there was a great deal of popular comment, and a wide circulation was found for a pamphlet entitled "Innocence Oppressed; or, The Death of Ivan," and others of a similar character. An allusion will be found in Casanova's Memoirs to the excitement caused at the time. Casanova was then at Riga in the company of Prince Charles Biron, son of Anna's favourite, and Catherine happened to visit the town in the course of a tour in Livonia. On the day after her arrival, writes Casanova, the news came of

[1] "Not too near and not too far," she writes in a memorandum; "it will suffice if it does not become a shrine."

Ivan's death. "The affair made such a sensation that the prudent Panin sent courier after courier to beg the Empress to come back." She went back, but found all quiet. "It was reported," Casanova continues, "that she was in connivance with the assassins, but I believe this to be a calumny. She was strong-minded, but not perfidious or cruel." Wroughton, whom we have already mentioned, is quoted in Sir Nathaniel Wraxall's Memoirs as considering Catherine's knowledge of Ivan's destruction as "problematical" — that is to say, apparently, he thinks she may have been more implicated in it than in the death of Peter, in which he says that Catherine's participation was "involuntary, reluctant, and the result of an insurmountable necessity." Wraxall himself seems to lean more to the opinion of Catherine's actual guilt in the case of Ivan; but his knowledge of the affair was second or third hand, and he is willing to believe that Catherine had a part in the death of her daughter-in-law, the former Princess of Hesse-Darmstadt, in 1776, and possibly in that of the Princess Augusta of Würtemburg in 1789. Such crimes, however, were really alien to the character of Catherine. She was ready to make full use

of the opportunities offered her by what she calls "His Sacred Majesty Chance." But the cruelty necessary to plan a murder, even in defence of her throne, was never hers. Of course, she was accused of such crimes. She was much hated, as well as much loved; and she offered such an easy target for the malevolent.

The removal of Ivan was lucky for her. But false Ivans and false Peters continued to give her trouble. The most dangerous pretender did not appear until late in 1773, when Pugatshef, claiming to be Peter III., and stamping on coins struck by him the words *Redivivus et ultor*, caused a really formidable revolt, in which all the *raskolniks*, and many Tartar tribes, joined. After Pugatshef's betrayal and decapitation in 1774 Catherine thought it advisable to show herself in Moscow, where she spent some time, to complete the impression caused by her victory. After that date internal troubles ceased. Catherine's reversal of Peter's policy of abolition of the Secret Chancery and of resumption of monastic property caused some regrets for the brief reign which preceded hers. On the other hand, her efforts to check the abuses of the existing administration, and to give Russia an enlightened code, told in her

favour. Her Instructions for the arrangement of the new code might be all pillaged, as she confessed, from Montesquieu, Beccaria, and other Western writers; and she might find it necessary, on the outbreak of the Turkish War, to suspend the meetings of the Commission of six hundred and fifty deputies drawn from all classes and races of her Empire to discuss the code. Nevertheless, she allowed at the two hundred sittings of those deputies in 1776-1768 a freedom of speech never heard before or since in Russia; and she did, as she averred, gather hints for all the Empire. The Economical Society, which she had founded, and over which she had made president that politician in spite of himself, Gregory Orlof, even proposed to the Commission the question of the emancipation of the serfs—without any practical result, it is true.[1] The various departments of State, corrupt and inefficient in the extreme, were in her early reign purified and improved, if

[1] M. Rambaud in his "History of Russia" points out that Catherine, in spite of a few generous impulses, finally exaggerated the existing state of affairs for the serfs. More than 150,000 Crown peasants were turned by her into serfs by being distributed among her favourites; and as early as 1767 an edict forbade serfs to make complaints against their masters, who, on their part, could send their serfs to Siberia, or into the army, at will.

they relapsed into their former state as she grew old. With regard to foreign countries, she marked her accession to the throne by a declaration of peaceful principles; and, though she lost no time in denouncing Frederick, she did not, until Panin's death, actually depart from Peter's policy of friendship with Prussia. For this Panin was responsible, as he was a steadfast supporter of this course for Russia, and it was only when Panin had retired to die that Patiomkin was able to carry out his ideas of closer relations with Austria.

Catherine could not fail to be a popular sovereign, in some senses of the word. Casanova gives a striking picture of her accessibility to people in general. He tells how he went to a masked ball in St Petersburg in 1764—a ball which lasted sixty hours, and at which everyone ate and drank freely, and gaiety and licence were visible on every face. "All at once someone cried; 'Here comes the Tsarina!' and we caught sight of the tall figure of Gregory Orlof following a masked figure, draped in a domino which might have been worth five copecks at the most. The masked figure moved in and out of the crowd, getting jostled by persons who really did not know her. Some-

times she sat down by people who were very likely talking about her. She probably heard many remarks which were not meant for her ears and might wound her pride; but the experience must have been extremely useful to her." Again he tells of her at the concerts given in the Palace after dinner every Sunday, to which all had access. Catherine would walk about, stopping to speak to anyone whom she wished to honour. Casanova talked with her but three times; but he was immensely impressed by the kindness and gentleness of her demeanour, which gave her so much advantage over her opponents, and by her imperturbable good-humour.

Gregory Orlof, however, was not one who would be restrained by feelings of tenderness for the general amiability of character, or by gratitude for the proofs of particular affection for him, in the Empress who maintained him in his position against the attacks of his numerous enemies. His attitude changed gradually from that of excessive, even vulgar, familiarity to one of coldness. He seemed inclined, in the words of one of the biographers of the time, to seek his amusement in the company of other ladies; another writer puts

it more strongly, and says that he had affairs in every town. The experiment would surely have been dangerous had Catherine been as cruel as some of her traducers would make her.

But indications must have presented themselves at last to Orlof that he had nearly exhausted his Empress's patience and worn out her love, for he showed a sudden flash of energy after so many years of sloth. Plague had broken out in Southern and Central Russia. It had attacked the Russian army in winter quarters at Jassy at the end of 1770, and killed thousands. In South Russia the doctors were at a loss how to meet it, mistaking it, to begin with, for other diseases. About Christmas it had spread to Moscow. Here, too, the doctors were helpless, and incurred the wrath of the people, who handled them violently, and broke into general rioting. Their icons alone inspired any confidence in the mob, and the Archbishop Ambrosius, who tried to persuade them that reliance on such alone would not save them, was cruelly butchered. The panic made matters worse, and it was calculated that fifty thousand succumbed in Moscow before the epidemic ceased. The disturbances had been raging furiously for about two months, when

Gregory Orlof, recalling his old courage, asked, and obtained, the Empress's permission to go to Moscow. She allowed him one hundred thousand roubles for expenses. He met with wonderful success. He took vigorous steps at once: prohibited for the time all assemblies of the inhabitants, visited the afflicted personally, made the doctors and officers attending him burn the clothes of the victims, and finally, when winter's severity began to be felt, had the epidemic under control and all panic allayed. Catherine was delighted. In recognition of his deed she not only erected a triumphal arch of marble at Tsarsko Selo, bearing the inscription: "Moscow delivered from plague by Orlof," but also caused a medal to be struck, showing Orlof's head on one side and on the other a figure of Quintus Curtius, with the legend: "Russia also has such sons."

Orlof's pretensions were naturally not diminished by the fame of his exploits, and as his brother the Admiral had also covered himself with glory at the battle of Tchesme the Orlof rule seemed more firmly established than ever. The family, however, was not one to treat a situation diplomatically, and Gregory resumed his former habits of unfaithfulness to the

Empress and arrogance towards the Court. The Court might have to tolerate his treatment, but Catherine was only long-suffering up to a certain point. It is suggested that her affection for Bobrinsky, Orlof's son and hers, delayed an open rupture. But Orlof must have felt his position precarious once more, for he seized the opportunity of the weariness felt, on both the Russian and the Turkish sides, over the war and the sufferings of the two armies on the Danube from plague, to ask for the mission of negotiating a peace. Catherine granted the request. The result for Orlof, and for the prestige hitherto enjoyed by his family, was remarkable. For Catherine herself, too, a new era opened.

Orlof left St Petersburg on the 18th of August. Catherine, in a letter written at the time, speaks of him as her "angel of peace." The name was most inappropriate. Orlof had no sooner arrived at Foksani than he quarrelled with Rumianzof, and, conceiving the idea of outdoing the Marshal's exploits, and attacking Constantinople itself, broke off negotiations with the Turks. In the meantime he proceeded to give entertainments on a startling scale at Jassy, appearing at times in a costume which

Catherine had presented to him, which was so covered with diamonds that its value was estimated at a million roubles. A rude shock drove him from these revelries. The news reached him that two weeks after he had quitted the Russian capital a young lieutenant in the Horse Guards, called Vassiltshikof, had been installed in his rooms in the Palace, and was enjoying the position of favourite. All the energy that had been his returned to Orlof once more. Abandoning both his mission and his entertainments, he sprang into a carriage, and started, without another thought, on a journey of a thousand leagues. The fame of the exploit rang over Russia; but it was all in vain. He had almost reached St Petersburg when an Imperial messenger stopped him, and told him that he must go into quarantine. Plague was again prevalent in the South, and St Petersburg must be protected. His house at Gatshina was suggested as a suitable place at which to stay, and Orlof accepted this ignominious termination of his meteoric journey. Catherine prepared to strip him of his honours, and wrote to demand the diamond-studded miniature. With a touch of chivalry hardly to be looked for in him, Orlof sent back the

frame, but refused the portrait to any but the actual hands of her who gave it to him. At last Catherine was softened a little—though, as a matter of fact, she appears, while refusing his entreaties to see her, to have written to him constantly at Gatshina—and a compromise was effected. He was allowed to bear the title of Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, the patent of which had already been conferred on him by the Emperor Joseph, but was condemned to a course of European travel. He was permitted to visit St Petersburg in the winter, and he certainly showed no signs there of embarrassment, either before Catherine or before the Court. He even insisted on friendship with the new favourite. For the story of Vassiltshikof's installation had been perfectly true. This was the doing of Count Panin, aided by Zahar Tchernichef, who hated the Orlofs. Panin foresaw danger if Catherine's affections should be disengaged—and he had, of course, never been a friend of the Orlofs. He took advantage of the angel's absence on his mission of peace to supplant him in the Palace by one who was no more than a good-looking young man.

From the point of her acceptance of Vassilt-

shikof as a lover may be dated Catherine's starting out on the career which made her name notorious in Europe. Had she remained content with Orlof—to assume for a moment the possibility of contentment with one so faithless—she would have done nothing that her predecessors on the Russian throne had not done before, save in according the favourite more public recognition than had been usual. Had she even taken up Patiomkin now, to rule her during the rest of her reign, she would have given little offence to her contemporaries. But in taking for her companion Panin's choice, and by following him with a succession of others, even though one of them was a Patiomkin, she passed the bounds of what the not usually censorious eighteenth century thought decent. What excuse there was before was now wanting. Gregory Orlof had, more than any other man, gained her crown for her, at the risk of his life, and Catherine persuaded herself that she found in him other attractions than those of the senses. Vassiltshikof had no claims known to history. He came of a very good family—was, in fact, of old *boyar* descent. The Prussian Minister, writing to his master, found him of medium height, very dark, and rather good-

looking, but not distinguished. He notes, too, Vassiltshikof's politeness, amiability, and retiring manners, and his slight embarrassment at the position which he occupied, and Catherine's good spirits and gaiety since Orlof's departure and the new favourite's accession. A less harmful choice could hardly have been made. When Catherine appointed him one of her chamberlains he was said to have been at a loss how to comport himself until he received the encouragement of Prince Baratinsky, who, however, was glad, like Panin and Tchernichef, to help in the downfall of the Orlofs, whose yoke the old nobility bore with difficulty. But he filled the position to which he was called. He did not abuse it. He accepted the situation, occupied the rooms assigned to the favourite, and enjoyed the emoluments of the office. He did not justify the fears of those who looked for a second Orlof, and he never attempted to interfere in the affairs of State. He was a nonentity without a record, and, after his period of favour, relapsed into the obscurity from which he came. The rising of the star of Patiomkin eclipsed what little light had been his. It was Patiomkin, really, who conquered the Orlofs; it almost seems that they might, but for him,

have regained their old sway. Such seemed, indeed, to be the case early in 1774.

Catherine, having obtained for the time peace in the matter of her love affairs, was able to turn her attention to a project of considerable importance to Russia. The Grand Duke Paul was eighteen years old at the beginning of 1773, and it was advisable to think of the succession to the throne. Catherine followed the old plan of sending to Germany. The Hesse-Darmstadt family was selected, and the mother and her three daughters came to Russia to be inspected. It is an extraordinary proof that the Orlof influence was by no means dead yet that Catherine's first meeting with them was at Gregory's house at Gatshina, where the Hesse-Darmstadts were invited to break their journey to St Petersburg, though the master was still nominally in disgrace. The ex-favourite considerably complicated matters by his presence, and by actually making love to one of the young princesses himself, so as to alarm Frederick the Great (again the marriage-broker for Russia) with the notion that he had designs of marrying into the family. But it was only a passing fancy. Finally Paul, or Catherine for him, chose the eldest of the three daughters,

Wilhelmina. Wraxall unkindly remarks that her two sisters must have been very deficient in personal attractions, as he had rarely beheld a young person less favoured by Nature than the Princess Wilhelmina. "She had a scorbutic humour in her face, nor did her countenance indicate either intelligence or dignity, but she was said to be amiable and pleasing in her manners." This unfortunate young woman was doomed to a short but miserable career at the Russian Court. Without believing Wraxall's wild tale of Catherine putting her out of the way in 1776, we must admit that Wilhelmina's treatment was as ungenerous as that of any of the young German princesses imported into Russia.

The marriage of the Grand Duke in October involved the cessation of Count Panin's duties as tutor, and it was hoped by his enemies, especially the Orlofs, that he would at the same time lose his other office as director of foreign affairs. Catherine is said to have intended to dismiss him, but to have been dissuaded by the earnest entreaties of Paul. In the end Panin was confirmed in the Foreign Office, and presented with large sums of money, as a recognition of his services to the Grand

Duke. This did not suit the Orlofs at all; and Gregory, whose exile had, for a time at least, been terminated by himself, reproached the Empress keenly for her retention of Panin. She represented the necessity of his services, and did her best to soothe Orlof's feelings. Celebrations during the winter of Russia's successes against Turkey brought additional marks of her favour to the family in the person of the Admiral Alexis. But Gregory was not to be appeased, apparently, for he left St Petersburg once more, with the docile Vassiltshikof still reigning favourite, and, after a riotous and ostentatiously magnificent series of festivities at his house at Reval, paid the Continent a visit.

After spending a few months in European travels, during which he created quite a sensation by his extravagant living and heavy gambling, Gregory Orlof suddenly reappeared in Russia. His enemies had hoped that his absence would last much longer, and would give time for his influence to be forgotten. Catherine herself appeared disconcerted by his return. She had already confided to a friend her intention of making a stand, and, "after eleven years of suffering, living according to her pleasure, and in entire independence." She

tried to confine him to his mansion at Reval, but in vain. He found banishment there insupportable, and insisted on coming to St Petersburg. Catherine could not be consistent in her attitude towards him. Even while he was waiting at Reval she had loaded him with presents and his friends with honours. "What, then," asks Tooke, "could be the motive of such a singular conduct? Catherine had no longer any regard for Orlof. She no longer stood in awe of him; but she dreaded, she hated, a faction which she conceived might be forming—namely, that of the Grand Duke." Tooke may be partly right; he was in St Petersburg at the time. But it is hardly true that Catherine "had no longer any regard" for Orlof. She was never wont to dismiss all regard for a former favourite from her heart, even when so great a strain was put upon her loyalty as his marriage with someone else. And, with reference to Gregory Orlof, she never forgot his share in her elevation to the throne. Consequently it is not surprising that, when he now came to St Petersburg, she not only did not reject him but rather seemed to welcome him with joy.

Alexis Orlof was also back in St Petersburg

again, and in high favour. There seemed, to outside observers, every probability of the Orlof domination becoming as strong as it ever had been before. Gregory asked for the restoration of all his former posts, and pressed again for the dismissal of Panin. Catherine still refused to abandon the old minister; but she yielded in other respects, and removed the outward tokens of Gregory's disgrace by granting him his former dignities. Even the not very important obstacle of Vassiltshikof was removed, though really for another reason, as will be seen, than to gratify Orlof. The favourite was invited to retire to Moscow, having received numerous consolatory presents, in addition to the million or more roubles which he had already drawn from the Russian exchequer. He retired, and ultimately married. Orlof might well think to himself that he stood again where he did before. Once more he treated his Empress as familiarly as an equal, and was thoroughly at ease with himself. Probably, however, Catherine tolerated his freedom with more difficulty than before. Tooke rather quaintly writes: "Gregory Orlof had been reinstated in the place of favourite"—it is not certain to what extent this was the fact—"only

from motives of policy. Policy may feign a passion, but cannot command it. . . . The incorrigible coarseness of his manners, formerly palliated by the warmth of his attachment, became insufferable when united with decayed affection."

We have said that it is not certain to what extent it was the fact that Orlof was actually reinstated in the place of favourite, because it is difficult to see how, between the dismissal of Vassiltshikof and the appearance on the scene of the greatest of all Catherine's lovers, there was any time in which Orlof could be in possession of his old position at the Palace. Even if, with M. Waliszewski, we make Vassiltshikof's departure take place in March, 1774, (though twenty-two months are commonly assigned to him, which would bring his term down to June in that year), Patiomkin was in St Petersburg at Catherine's request in January, and was made her aide-de-camp next month. That Orlof really returned to the Palace seems difficult to reconcile with Patiomkin's rise so early in 1774.

Catherine had, indeed, another reason for getting rid of Vassiltshikof than the desire of pleasing Gregory Orlof, and this reason also

impelled her to destroy the Orlof ascendancy beyond a chance of its restoration. The appearance is now made on the scene of one who was certainly the most remarkable Russian of his time, and the only one of Catherine's favourites who influenced his country's place in European politics. The antecedents of Gregory Alexandrovitch Patiomkin may be left to be related in the next chapter. He had figured to a very small extent yet in Catherine's history. After a subordinate, but not altogether insignificant, part in the Revolution of 1762 he was one of Catherine's chamberlains, but afterwards seems to have been forgotten, while he devoted himself to soldiering. He quarrelled with the Orlofs, to his own discomfiture, and, after nearly abandoning the world for a monastery, resumed his military career until, in 1773, we find Catherine making what could hardly be interpreted otherwise than as an advance to him. At the beginning of 1774 Patiomkin was back in St Petersburg. Vassiltshikof left for Moscow, and the post of favourite was open. A period may have followed during which Gregory Orlof filled it in the eyes of the world and Patiomkin in reality; it is generally so stated. But, if so, that period must have been brief. The beginning

of Patiomkin's term is universally placed in the year 1774, and at the commencement of 1775 Patiomkin is found in complete triumph over the Orlof opposition, and installed before the sight of all as favourite of the Empress. All efforts to displace him ended in failure. Orlof is reported to have had a long explanation with Catherine, in which he recalled his services to her, and said that she could only reproach him with being less young than his rival. She answered kindly, assured him she was always his friend, but remained unshaken.

The earlier favourite did not completely cut himself off from Catherine until 1777,[1] when, at the age of forty-three, he married his nineteen-year-old cousin, the Countess Zinovief. This was a sudden love match. Owing to the close consanguinity of the two—according to Russian custom they were counted as uncle and niece—the marriage was against religious and civil laws alike, and the Senate promptly annulled it. Catherine, however, stepped in at last, and had

[1] He remained in the Council, it seems. Tooke tells a story of him being summoned to a meeting one day when in the middle of a game of cards, and refusing to come, only giving the messenger, who pressed for an answer for the Empress, the quotation, Psalm i. 1 : *Beatus vir qui non abiit in consilio impiorum.*

the Senate's decision upset. The young wife was one of her maids-of-honour, and Catherine may well have been glad to see her former lover safely disposed of. M. Waliszewski will have it that Catherine never forgave Orlof the insult of this marriage. His reasons for thinking so are obscure. In addition to forwarding the union, Catherine showed not the slightest resentment. Patiomkin's influence had quite driven out that of Orlof, and what more convenient means of disposing of the earlier ruler of her heart could there be than that which he found himself? Catherine was relieved of a great anxiety. The Princess Orlof's health became delicate, and in 1780 she was taken abroad by her husband in search of a cure. She got worse, however, and died at Lausanne in June 1782. Orlof completely broke down through grief, and was hardly responsible for the actions which followed. He returned to St Petersburg, and reappeared at the Court, only to present to his former friends the sad spectacle of his insanity. This took the form of extravagant fits of gaiety, alternating with bursts of bitter reproaches against Catherine, who had at length to take notice of the unfortunate man, and to make him retire to Moscow. There he grew worse

still up to the moment of his death in April, 1783. The French Minister at St Petersburg at the time, the Marquis de Vérac, writes that Orlof's illness had its terrible details, of which he dared not write even in cypher. Tooke says that the "bleeding shade of Peter III. pursued Orlof into every retreat," and that he expired in the agony of despair.

On hearing of Orlof's death Catherine manifested every appearance of extreme grief. She wrote to one correspondent that, during the night after receipt of the news, she was in such a delirium that she had to be bled; to another that she was suffering terribly. M. Waliszewski maintains that Catherine was only anxious to appear deeply affected, but was not really so. This view is, of course, in harmony with his contention that she never forgave him for his marriage, with its implied insult to her. The attitude, however, does not seem characteristic of Catherine. Revengefulness and the bearing of malice were vices singularly absent from her disposition. It is more satisfactory to believe her sincere when she professed great sorrow. No strong argument against this supposition can be deduced from the fact that she was able to write to Grimm soon after the deaths of

Orlof and Panin (whose decease took place not many days before that of his great opponent) of "the boldness and spirit of the one and the backward prudence of the other, and your most humble servant performing a canter between the two." It is true that such an expression does not betray grief. But she was writing to Grimm humorously on Russian politics, and not talking of her personal feelings.

The long mastery over Catherine of Gregory Orlof might seem difficult to explain in comparison with her record of ten favourites during a reign of thirty-four years. But many reasons combined to give him so strong a hold upon her. His personal beauty, though it may have exceeded that of his successors (except, perhaps, Zoritch), was but one appeal to her. Her admiration of his reckless courage was another, and, as all that courage was devoted to her, it was very powerful. The gratitude inspired by the position which he won for her was, as she always showed, a never-ending claim upon her. Then she professed to see aspects of Orlof's character which it is hard for us to discern. She could talk of Nature's extraordinary liberality to him in face, in mind, in heart, and in soul. To us his leading trait is excess; moderation

was unknown to him. He was extravagant in his daring; he took no heed how he risked his life to seduce the wife of his future Emperor and to put her on the throne afterwards. He was extravagant in love; he cared not how he compromised Catherine the Grand Duchess nor how he brought censure on Catherine the Empress by public familiarities. He was extravagant in his living; he astonished Russia by his entertainments at Jassy and Reval, and the world by his dress and his high play on his European tour. He was extravagant in his very indolence, for he long had the power to rule Russia had he willed. His most amiable points were his affection for his brothers (they were united as no brothers had ever been, declared Catherine), and his devotion, later in life, to his young wife. One contemporary French writer, Sabatier, professed to see in him simplicity, affability, good-humour, honesty, and lack of pretension. Others, too, speak well of him in his earlier days. But there is a strong consensus of opinion as to his arrogance, stupidity, and coarseness, which it is hard to reconcile with some of the eulogies, though such qualities may well have gone with frankness. The way in which Catherine lavished

gifts and honours upon him, and her carelessness of his want of decency, were well calculated to foster arrogance and coarseness. But it is difficult to believe in his original simplicity or honesty when we consider how, having attained his wish of ruling her who ruled the Empire, he proceeded to flout her love and pursue intrigues in the Court and outside. Perhaps this, however, is a proof of his openness. In the eyes of his country it must stand to his credit that he did not meddle in its affairs, or only to the smallest extent. Yet not much praise can be his for this, since it was due to his want of ambition that he did no harm. Sabatier assigns to him "a direct good sense" in public affairs. Catherine strenuously maintained his possession of intellect, and did her best to develop it, reading books with him which she thought would fit him to take part in Russia's government. Orlof's unwearying thirst for pleasure soon checked his spasmodic efforts at study. Nevertheless, it is impossible to dismiss the idea that there was in him some fund of power which was shown to Catherine alone, and which gave her the support which she always craved, and afterwards found in Patiomkin (who resembled Orlof in that he also

was indolent, extravagant, and excessive). Catherine told the truth to Grimm, if to anyone in the world; and she wrote to him in 1776 that she always liked to be carried along by those more disposed to action than herself, if only they concealed their purpose, and that, of all who indulged her in that liking, Orlof was the most able—"He instinctively leads, and I follow him." Here must be the secret of Orlof's character. It was well hidden, it must be confessed.

Catherine's son by Gregory Orlof, Bobrinsky, if he strongly resembled his mother in looks, was more like his father in character. Catherine's affection for him is supposed to have had much to do with her toleration of the father's infidelities in the early seventies. She sent him to Leipsic and to Lausanne to be educated, and brought him to St Petersburg in 1782—the time when Gregory appeared for the last time, broken down and demented. The son promptly distinguished himself by the looseness of his living, and was sent away. When Paul came to the throne he recalled Bobrinsky, recognised him as a brother, in one of his odd fits, and made him a major in the Horse Guards. Bobrinsky soon disgraced himself again, and was dismissed from

his post. He had two sisters, whom Catherine had brought up, by her chief waiting-woman, Mademoiselle Protasof, as her nieces.

As to Catherine's relations with Gregory's brother, Alexis Orlof, the scandalous put the worst interpretation upon them, and attributed to her a son by him, a youth called Tchesmensky, who was in the Corps des Cadets at one time. Alexis had almost as strong a claim to Catherine's gratitude as his brother. He ably seconded Gregory in preparing the Guards to rise in 1762. It was he who brought the anxiously waiting Grand Duchess the news in the early morning of the 9th of July. And it was to him that the care of the unhappy Peter was confided after his abdication. The murder of Peter was almost universally attributed to him, or to him, Pasik, and Theodore Baratinsky together. The story is well known of the Tsar Paul, after his accession, finding among his mother's papers a document signed by Alexis Orlof, which acknowledged that he was responsible for the deed, and exclaiming: "Thanks be to God!"—for his mother was thus cleared. There is another tale of Alexis Orlof, at supper with the Russian Minister at Vienna, on his way to Italy to resume command of the Russian fleet in 1771.

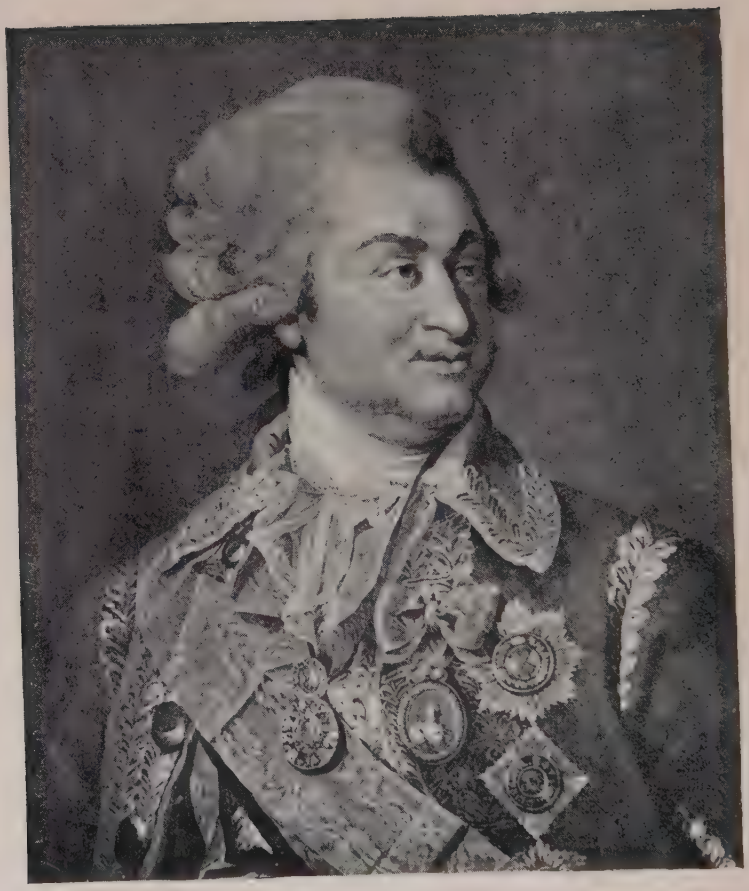
Orlof began to talk about Peter's deposition. None of the other guests ventured to speak of the tragedy; but Orlof related the facts of his own accord, and, perceiving shudders of horror in his listeners, added that "it was a lamentable thing for a man of so much humanity as he possessed to be forced to do what he had been commanded." If such stories be true, it is indeed curious that Paul took no more active step against the murderer than making him walk in the procession with his father's exhumed coffin, and carry the crown which was to be placed on the coffin before re-burial.

Whether he was or was not responsible for Peter's death, Alexis Orlof was prominently decorated and rewarded when Catherine was firmly seated on the throne. He devoted himself to naval matters, and towards the end of 1769 took two Russian squadrons round from the Baltic into the Mediterranean to deal with the Turkish fleet. The credit of the crushing victory of the Russians at Tchesme was all given by Catherine to Admiral Orlof, though Tooke alleges that it was really due to his three English lieutenants—Elphinstone, Greig, and Dugdale. When he returned in triumph to St Petersburg Alexis had a position not

second even to his brother Gregory's in Russia, and Sabatier describes Catherine as venerating, loving, and fearing him. Fear was, probably, more her attitude than love, for he seems always to have shared his brother's periods of disfavour instead of standing entirely on his own merits. After Gregory's death Alexis, who, as may be imagined, did not get on well with Patiomkin, the man whom he had half blinded, found it prudent to retire from St Petersburg. Catherine, it is true, granted him the honours held by his late brother, including the wearing of her miniature set in diamonds; but an open quarrel with Patiomkin in the Empress's private apartments rendered his position insupportable, and he yielded to necessity. His figure lacks what attractions that of Gregory has. He was as much a giant as the latter, but a scar received in a pothouse brawl in his youth marred his looks, and his brute force seemed to his contemporaries his leading characteristic. According to that enemy of the Orlof family, Princess Dashkof, *le balafré* was one of the biggest scoundrels on earth; this was the character she gave him in conversation with Diderot. But he was a scoundrel who escaped his deserts. Though

his language concerning Catherine is said to have exhibited at times outrageous licence she allowed his services to her to outweigh all, and Paul's gentle treatment of him is simply incomprehensible.

PATIOMKIN AND THE MINOR FAVOURITES



Prince Potiomkin.

CHAPTER V

PATIOMKIN AND THE MINOR FAVOURITES

CATHERINE'S first allusion to Patiomkin is contained in her letter to Stanislas Poniatowsky describing the Revolution of 1762. In her assignment of praise to the various conspirators, at the end of that letter, she remarks that "in the Horse Guards, an officer named Chitron, aged twenty-two, and a subaltern of seventeen, called Patiomkin, directed everything with courage and activity." Patiomkin's first meeting with Catherine was, according to the commonly accepted story of the day, on the occasion of her review of the troops after the drawing up of the manifesto and form of oath at the new Winter Palace on the famous 9th of July. Catherine's account is that she was on foot, and she does not say she was in the Guards' uniform at the time; she was not proclaimed Colonel of the Guards until later in the day. The more ornate version of the affair is that she was mounted and in uniform, and that Patiomkin, perceiving that she had

no plume in her hat, rode up, and offered her his own, and that it was with difficulty he could persuade his horse to leave the side of the Empress's mount again—a fact which impressed Patiomkin's appearance on Catherine's mind. The details are not of much importance, however, as the story is probably apocryphal.

The age assigned by Catherine in 1762 is most certainly wrong; but this does not disprove the identity of the subaltern with the afterwards celebrated Prince Patiomkin, for Catherine, writing at the actual time of the events, may well have erred about the age of quite a minor participant in the plot which made her Empress of Russia.[1] The date of Patiomkin's birth is variously given as 1736 and 1739. The latter seems probably right. He was born near Smolensk, his family being Polish in origin, and his father, Alexander Patiomkin, being an officer in the Russian army. Gregory Alexandrovitch, according to his biographers, was sent to Moscow at an early age to study for the Church; but his character, as might, indeed, be imagined from his later history, was thought by his teachers to show in him more aptitude

[1] The fact that Ségur makes Patiomkin eighteen in 1762, however, is strange. Was Patiomkin optimistic about his own age?

for a military than for an ecclesiastical career, and accordingly he entered his father's profession in 1754, when, had Catherine's early estimate of his age been correct, he would have been but nine — scarcely old enough, perhaps, to have proved his unsuitability for the Church. No certain record exists of his early days. His anonymous German historian states that his propensity to pleasure frequently led him into bad company, where he contracted that "dissoluteness of manners and depravity of mind of which he could never completely divest himself afterwards, and which constantly influenced his conduct during his extraordinary career." This may have been so. All that we know is that he was a subordinate officer in the Horse Guards under Prince George of Holstein in 1762, and that he belonged to the party of the Orlofs previous to the Revolution of that year.

Patiomkin's immediate reward for the part he played in the plot was a colonelcy and a mission to Stockholm to inform the Russian Minister there of Catherine's accession; but very soon afterwards he was attached to the Court as chamberlain. How he came to be given this post is unknown. There is an absurd

story of the Orlofs praising him to the Empress as being an excellent mimic, and introducing him to her, whom he immediately captivated by an imitation of her own voice. Thereon she admitted him to the inner circle of her acquaintance, continues the tale. This inner circle was that society to which the more favoured of the foreign ministers were afterwards admitted, and where Catherine dispensed with formalities and became simply the hostess. We have no sure evidence as to its composition in the early days of her reign. Catherine seems to have taken a sufficient interest in Patiomkin to procure him an office in connection with the Senate in the following year. But in 1769 he is found engaged in military service again, and away from the Court, so that her interest can no longer have been strong enough to make her keep him about her. At some time in this period, though the exact date is impossible to fix, Patiomkin came into violent opposition to the Orlofs. The ordinary account of the quarrel is that Patiomkin, presuming on the favour which he had succeeded in obtaining (which many of the writers make out to have been far greater than we have any warrant for supposing correct), boasted, in the presence of the

brothers, of his influence with the Empress. This happened one day at Gregory Orlof's house in St Petersburg, when Alexis and Patiomkin were playing billiards together. Patiomkin's indiscretion aroused the Admiral's anger, an altercation ensued, and Patiomkin received a blow in the face, in consequence of which he lost the sight of one of his eyes. In mortification at this, and unable as yet to overthrow the Orlof influence, Patiomkin retired to the neighbourhood of his native Smolensk. Here he lived in retirement for a whole year, entertaining serious thoughts of retiring from the world and becoming a monk. His early theological training, in spite of the unsuitability which he had shown for a priestly career, had left in him a permanent, if intermittently manifested, leaning towards religion. He announced repeatedly throughout his life his intention of abandoning a secular for a monastic calling. On the present occasion, however, he contrived to let the Empress hear that it was through despair over his love for her that he was throwing up his career. This did not fail to appeal to Catherine. "Where," Patiomkin's anonymous biographer is made by his English translator to ask, "where is the female that

does not feel for the pangs occasioned by the passion she inspires?" A message was conveyed to Patiomkin that he need not give up all in despair, and he did not fail to listen to the hint. His services in the Turkish war under Marshal Rumianzof were rewarded by promotion to the rank of lieutenant-general, and it was not long before he received a communication which promised still more. Vassiltshikof's influence over Catherine was small, if any, and Gregory Orlof's was now unwelcome, and against her will. In the middle of the year 1773 Patiomkin, while away on foreign service, received an extraordinary letter from the Empress, in which, after expressing her assurance that all his acts were prompted by zeal for her and for his country, she told him that she was anxious to keep zealous, brave, intelligent, and able men out of danger, and begged him not to run into risks if he could help it. "In reading this letter you will perhaps ask why it was written," she concluded. "I can only say: in order to prove to you how I think of you, for I always wish you all that is good." Patiomkin did not misunderstand the letter. He took it to be what it must have been intended to be—an invitation to return to

Court. At the beginning of 1774 he was in St Petersburg, in February he was aide-de-camp to Catherine, and a few months later he was favourite. Gregory Orlof is said to have been absent at a hunting-seat at the exact time of Patiomkin's installation. When he returned he found the new lover installed in the Palace. "Cyclops," as Orlof had nicknamed his rival, had proved too much for him.

Patiomkin proved also too much for all his enemies, and they at first were numberless. His ascendancy over Catherine herself very early became almost absolute, and with the support of that he crushed opposition. It speaks much for the hold which Catherine had over her Court, and her subjects generally, that an interloper with such a contemptuous disregard for the feelings of others as Patiomkin ever showed should have been able, in reliance on her favour, to establish himself firmly on the necks, as it were, of those who hated him. They had, moreover, to bring themselves to be civil to him, though he cared not to be so to them. Even the Orlofs were outwardly reconciled. Catherine brought this about herself. Tooke says that she wished to use

Gregory Orlof as a check upon Patiomkin, as Panin had been on Orlof; but the cases are not parallel, for Panin was not a lover. Some opponents Patiomkin got rid of summarily. Zahar Tchernichef was too powerful as head of the War Office, so Patiomkin insisted on being made vice-president, whereon the minister soon resigned. The favourite had already been raised to the rank of a field-marshal, but he was greedy of all the titles which he could obtain. He was unwilling that any of Orlof's former dignities should be lacking for him, and within a year of his elevation he had secured a portrait of the Empress set in diamonds, similar to that worn by Orlof. Only Plato Zubof, of his successors, was similarly honoured; Alexis Orlof wore his brother's after the latter's death. For the title of Prince of the Holy Roman Empire Patiomkin had to wait until 1776, but he obtained the patent readily enough from Joseph II. He was suspected of aiming, as Gregory Orlof had done, at actual marriage with Catherine. But Panin still remained, and even Patiomkin could not carry such a scheme through against Panin's opposition. Nor was Catherine herself any longer pre-

pared to risk her throne by marriage with a favourite.[1]

Though he could not persuade her to marriage, Patiomkin retained his power over her easily enough. Much of his success in this was due to the similarity of their ideas. They might well be in love, wrote the Frenchman Durand, for they are exactly alike. This was so both in internal and in foreign policy, as became more evident later, but the schemes were no doubt in the minds of Empress and minister already. At present Catherine appeared to the outward world as the originator of reforms and plans; Patiomkin's rule was more subtle, but his power at Court he took pains to display, and to display in the most extraordinary way. He is represented as flouting ceremony in a way in which the far from ceremonious Orlof had never ventured to do so. Receiving crowds of courtiers in his rooms at the Palace, dressed in his night

[1] M. Waliszewski narrates the story of Patiomkin's endeavour to break down her resistance by the aid of the priests and by alarming her conscience as to her manner of life. But her conscience was equal to the occasion. Patiomkin in vain threatened to devote himself to God, abandoning all for a monastery. Catherine put no obstacle in the way of that; she knew him too well.

attire, he would suddenly leave them, and proceed, just as he was, by the private staircase to the Empress's apartments. He never scrupled to appear before her, when consulting on State affairs, with bare legs, loose gown, and uncombed hair; nor did she resent it. The highest dignitaries Patiomkin delighted to treat with contempt, and this habit grew worse as time went by. On the other hand, he allowed much familiarity from subordinates, who had no such reason to dread him as those of higher rank; it was from very few indeed of his equals that he would brook familiarity.

The exact manner in which the position of official favourite passed from Patiomkin to the succession of lesser men, who came after him, without really taking from him his power, is not easy to make out. There were two theories commonly held: one that Patiomkin was desirous of resigning the Palace privileges of favouritism, while maintaining the power which he had built up, and so took advantage of a partiality which he observed Catherine feeling for another; and the other that Patiomkin's enemies, chiefly Panin, played upon Catherine's love of change, and ousted him by means of a new lover, only to be defeated by Patiomkin's

extraordinary strength of character. According to the supporters of the former view, Patiomkin had early recognised that Catherine might well tire of him as she had tired of others, and, therefore, took steps to insure her favour in such a way that, when her love failed, her interest might keep him in his place. Noticing that Catherine's attention had been attracted by a young secretary who had lately come to her, he left the field clear; and when he returned after a short absence, for which he had asked Catherine's consent, and found the favourite's apartments in the Palace occupied, he put on a reasonable appearance of sorrow, which induced the Empress to pour fresh honours on him and to confirm him in all he wanted—that is, his power in the State. The others say that Catherine had wearied of Patiomkin after two years, and that her eyes had fallen on Zavadofsky, a secretary engaged by her after he had been in the service of General Rumianzof, a steadfast enemy of the reigning favourite. Patiomkin was unwise enough to go on a tour of inspection in his new government of Novgorod, presented to him by his mistress, when Panin, aided by Orlof, secured the victory of Zavadofsky. Patiomkin was given a hint that he

should travel for a while—an ominous invitation, which he could not mistake. According to one account, he made preparations ostensibly to obey, but the next evening appeared with the utmost composure just as the Empress was sitting down to a party at whist. Catherine, without any sign of displeasure, dealt a card to him out of the pack, told him that he always played luckily, and spoke no more of his departure. The same account makes Gregory Orlof, away from St Petersburg at the time, hurry back on hearing of Patiomkin's disgrace, appear in Court, see Patiomkin at the Empress's side, kiss her hand, and leave at once for Moscow.

Possibly truth lies between the two accounts. Both Catherine and Patiomkin had many attachments afterwards, but their mutual affection allowed them to discuss these calmly, in fact intimately. To Patiomkin his position as keeper of Catherine's will was the important point; to Catherine the support of Patiomkin's mind. Both secured what was essential to them, while getting rid of what was proving irksome.

Zavadofsky, who was the first to occupy the position of what Tooke calls "subaltern

favourite" to Catherine, was in brains the superior of most of those whom Catherine elevated. But his term of office left little mark on history, owing to the fact that he was vastly inferior to Patiomkin. He was born in the Ukraine district, and was a secretary to Rumianzof, the conqueror of the Turks, before he entered Catherine's service in a similar capacity. From secretary he rapidly became favourite, yet little is known of his personality beyond that it pleased the Empress. Masson can only say of him that "he was young, vigorous, and well-built, but Catherine's inclination for him was soon at an end. He had been secretary; his disgrace made no noise. He continued to be employed in his affairs of the Cabinet, and was made a Privy Councillor." He fell out of favour in 1777 after little more than a year at the Palace.[1] His downfall was attributed to Patiomkin, who, seeing in Zavadofsky a distinct ambition to follow in his own steps and indulge in political ideas, decided that he must be supplanted. This was only to be done by finding a successor, for Patiomkin

[1] He was still living, and a rich man, in 1800. As he had received 90,000 roubles, besides a pension and an estate, it is not surprising that he was rich.

was too wise to wish to resume his former position.

The conduct of Patiomkin in discovering an object on which to engage Catherine's affections for the time will not commend itself to the moralists. Catherine, however, thought it right to reward him with a present of one hundred thousand roubles. Patiomkin probably asked for it. The favourite also made him a gift. The Prince had an unlimited thirst for money, and it became a custom, with the accession of a new favourite, for Patiomkin to be given some mark of the Empress's continued esteem. She also found it necessary, apparently, to remind him of this esteem on other set occasions, such as his birthday. The story is told that on one birthday she was out of humour with him, and only sent him a toothpick-case set with diamonds, worth about thirty thousand roubles. Patiomkin became so highly indignant that Catherine ended by sending him his usual hundred thousand in addition. "So that the resentment which she wished to show," says the teller of the story, "cost Her Majesty thirty thousand roubles above what she had been used to give on those occasions."

The choice of Patiomkin was an officer in

a hussar regiment, by name Zoritch. Though in the Russian service he was a Servian by birth, and so was the only foreigner whom Catherine ever made favourite. He had an odd individuality among the holders of that post. He admitted himself to be a barbarian, he was without education, he had been some years a prisoner in the galleys in Turkey, and he was about forty years of age in 1777—seven years younger than Catherine, it is true, but many years older than any other favourite of hers. But he had a strong point in his looks. He dazzled the world by his beauty, and the old ladies still talked of him as an Adonis, wrote Masson at the end of the century. Another writer, Méhée de la Touche, could describe him at fifty as made to be painted, with charming eyes and graceful manners. Catherine took some pains with him, trying to supply the deficiencies in his education, but apparently without success, for the general verdict was that she found him too uncultured. "I was fond of him yesterday, to-day I am not," she is said to have observed finally. She dismissed him, at any rate, after eleven months. He seems to have got on bad terms with his introducer and patron Patiomkin, whose supremacy

he found arduous, and whose honours he is said to have envied. Patiomkin refused a duel which Zoritch would have forced upon him, and the Servian was obliged to be content with a retreat with spoils to the extent of nearly a million and a half roubles; one hundred and twenty thousand of them he received at the start. He was given an estate at Shklof, in the Mohilef district of White Russia, with two hundred thousand roubles a year on which to keep it up. After a visit to Paris, where he stayed with the Russian Minister, he retired to Shklof, ruling as a sort of amiable prince, receiving travellers at his court, giving gorgeous entertainments, maintaining a theatre, and gambling. Yet he was bored with his kingdom, nevertheless, according to report. He entreated Catherine—his lady, as in his gratitude he called her—to allow him to return to St Petersburg, but in vain. The accession of Paul gave him the opportunity, and he came back to Court, to die in the last year of the century.

Zoritch, though not a very notable personage in most ways, honourably distinguished himself by one return which he made for the many roubles with which the Russian Treasury was called upon to supply him in his year of success. He founded at his own expense a military

school at Shklof, where he brought up two hundred young officers, in spite of the fact that he was so extravagant otherwise. The school became a very useful institution, and left him not altogether a debtor to the country of his adoption. This seems to give one touch of merit to an otherwise purely picturesque figure.

Catherine, after dismissing Zoritch for his ignorance, if that was her reason, as alleged, might have been expected to fill his place with someone more gifted with brains than him whom she selected. Prince Patiomkin is said to have turned his mind immediately after the Servian's departure to the question of how to occupy the Empress's heart in a manner which would threaten no danger to himself or his schemes. To his surprise Catherine anticipated him. He saw one day standing behind her chair a chamberlain whom he had never seen before. He may well have felt alarmed. So far he had duly kept the favourites in subjection, and had seen them go as soon as they had shown inconvenient ambitions, but there was no warrant that he would continue to do so. However, it was really unnecessary to feel apprehensions in the present case. The

new choice turned Catherine's thoughts in the unusual direction of music, of which she was not naturally fond. The Princess Dashkof gives a curious picture of her as a singer in the early days just after the Revolution. The Princess herself was an enthusiast; her husband, though he had some taste for it, was as poor a performer as the Empress. The latter, nevertheless, was fond of hearing the Princess sing, and sometimes, when she had done, would make a sign to Prince Dashkof and gravely propose a duet, which she used to call "the music of the spheres." Catherine and the Prince, neither of them knowing how to sing a note, would then perform in concert. "A sudden burst of the most exalted and ridiculously discordant tones was the consequence, one seconding the other, with scientific shrugs and all the solemn self-complacent airs and grimaces of musicians. From this, perhaps, she passed to a cat-concert, and imitated the purring of poor puss in the most droll and ludicrous manner, always taking care to add appropriate, half-comic, half-sentimental words, which she invented for the occasion; or else spitting like a cat in a passion, with her back up, she suddenly boxed the first person in her way, making up her hand into a

paw, and mewing so outrageously that, instead of the great Catherine, nothing but the wrongs of a grimalkin remained upon one's mind." A striking example, it must be admitted, of the playful and childish amusements to which Poniatowsky found her addicted a few years earlier! For orchestral music she had no taste at all. She could not endure it between the acts of a play, Masson says, and would commonly silence it. So she must have made some sacrifice to the tastes of Rimsky Korsakof. A later favourite also, Mamonof, persuaded her to spend no little time in listening to the concerts of which he was fond.

But Korsakof "delighted in all sounds of harmony," as Catherine wrote to Grimm. He was an excellent singer, and to gratify his tastes musical experts were brought from Italy, to accompany his voice and to assist in the concerts to which the Court of St Petersburg was now regularly given over. It was, indeed, a strange development. The favourite, however, had, except as a musican, little to recommend him but the looks which first attracted Catherine's notice to him. He was of Polish origin, and his name was Korsak, until it was changed into the more pleasing form of Rimsky

Korsakof. He was a non-commissioned officer in the Guards before being elevated to the posts of aide-de-camp, chamberlain, and favourite to his Empress. Masson dismisses him as a fop (*espèce de petit-maître russe*). He was more ostentatious in his dress than any of his predecessors, apparently even more than that hero of the diamond-decked coat, Gregory Orlof, and he received more presents of jewelry from Catherine. His general ignorance was a laughing-stock of a not too intellectual Court. The story was current of his ordering a library of volumes of assorted sizes when he was elevated to his position. The books were to be like those of the Empress, he told the bookseller; large ones for the bottom shelves and smaller and smaller as the shelves went up. No doubt the tradesman was delighted at this opportunity of getting rid of the "remainders" of the day. Apart from the amusement which they derived from his simplicity, Catherine's subjects were chiefly stirred with indignation at the drain on the national finances to please the young man. One hundred and fifty thousand roubles were presented to him at the start. It was computed at this time that favouritism in Catherine's reign had already

cost the country about forty-eight millions. This sum was to be nearly doubled before Catherine died.[1] It is remarkable that she succeeded in preventing the discontent at this particular form of extravagance from breaking out into open revolt.

Patiomkin had, of course, to receive his usual consolation over the installation of the new favourite. This time it took the form of an advance of seven hundred and fifty thousand roubles on his pension, which was to be one-tenth of that sum a year. His power was more absolute than ever, and every department of State was really under his control. Catherine lent herself readily to that adulation by which he made her see in him the devoted minister, and so suffered him to treat as he wished her Court and subjects. Among his aversions was Marshal Rumianzof, for whom he had contracted a dislike in the Turkish war, where Patiomkin won the rank of general. Rumianzof's sister was the Countess Bruce, Catherine's chief confident among her Court ladies. Patiomkin's enmity seems to have ex-

[1] Altogether, Rimsky Korsakof received from Catherine about a million roubles during his fifteen months. Tenors do not, as a rule, cost so much even now, remarks M. Waliszewski.

tended from her brother to her, so that he was suspected of being concerned in the Countess's fall, which involved the disgrace of Korsakof also. Catherine discovered an intrigue between her favourite and her friend, and required the retirement of both from Court, refusing even to see either again. The only thing that makes Patiomkin's participation in their dismissal improbable is that he could hardly have hoped for a less objectionable "subaltern favourite" than Korsakof. The tenor retired to Moscow, and ultimately settled on an estate near his predecessor Zoritch, with whom he seems to have lived on the terms of a friendly neighbour and fellow gambler.

In 1780 Catherine reached the fairly mature age of fifty-one, and might, perhaps, have been expected to adopt a quieter and more decorous manner of life. Her political importance was now greater than it had ever been before. Even the Emperor Joseph was persuaded in this year to pay a visit to his sister sovereign at St Petersburg. An amusing story is told of this visit. Catherine and Joseph met in May at Mohilef, in accordance with the schemes of Patiomkin to cultivate Austrian friendship rather than Prussian, and to secure an Austrian

alliance against Turkey. Joseph was a notorious hater of ceremony, and would only accept Catherine's invitation to the capital on condition that he was allowed to put up at an inn instead of the Palace. Catherine agreed, but outwitted him by converting the lodge of her English gardener in the Palace grounds into an inn by hanging out a catherine-wheel and the inscription "The Falkenstein Arms." Count Falkenstein was the Emperor Joseph's name when incognito. He was obliged after all to tolerate a round of festivities, and his visit was considered a distinct success for Russia. It was noted that the warmth of the welcome on this occasion was greater than during the visit four years earlier of Prince Henry of Prussia, Frederick's brother. Catherine had taken advantage, however, of the Prussian visit to secure a second wife for Paul, the Grand Duchess Natalie (Wilhelmina) having died in childbirth early in 1776. Frederick this time suggested the Princess Sophia of Würtemburg, and to her accordingly Paul was married.

Catherine was now, under the influence of Patiomkin, being led not unwillingly towards an Austrian alliance. But, despite her political ambitions, she could not dispense with a

favourite to succeed the disgraced Korsakof. The new choice was of one who gained the most kindly verdict of all who held the post. He was the most romantic figure in Catherine's disreputable romance. Lanskoi was but twenty-two when she took him into the Palace. He was one of the Cavalier Guards, a body of fifty men, all of captain's rank, whose only duty was to keep watch in turn over the Sovereign's apartments. They were selected for their appearance, and had a magnificent uniform, of which the silver armour alone cost a thousand roubles. Lanskoi was, like several other favourites, of a family by origin Polish. Masson, who is not gentle in his treatment of the favourites generally, admits Lanskoi to have been not only the one she loved the most but also the one who most deserved her love. "Full of sweetness and grace, amateur of the arts, friend of all the talents, humane and kindly, all the world seemed to share his Sovereign's fancy for him." He adds that the qualities of his mind might win him as much credit as those of his heart won him friends had he lived. Here Masson's unwonted enthusiasm is not supported by the evidence of others. No one denied his charm (except the Princess Dashkof,

who did not like him), but his intellectual gifts were not remarked. Catherine, however, in her infatuation, saw in him every promise, and she spent both time and money in developing his mind and tastes. His education had been poor; indeed, he had been so poor himself before his adoption by Catherine that one of his friends wrote of his fortune as consisting of five shirts. He had the inclination, however, to culture, and, as Catherine proudly told Grimm, read all the poets in one winter, and began on the historians the next. His fondness for pictures, cameos, prints, and coins cost Catherine—or rather Russia—dear, and it was at a time when she was talking about the need for retrenchment. About seven millions of roubles were heaped on him, and all the usual honours which fell to the favourites. He made no enemies because he had no political pretensions and shrank from affairs of State. With Patiomkin he was on the best of terms. It is said that at first the elder man was annoyed at the selection of a Cavalier Guard, he being the head of the corps; others make Lanskoi his discovery. He received two hundred thousand roubles at the time. But from the Prince's point of view there could not be a more suitable object for Catherine's love

than this unassuming and gentle person, who absorbed the Empress's thoughts in one direction and left them entirely without interference in the others. This was particularly useful to him at the time when he was in the last round of his struggle with Panin over the foreign policy of Russia, and was developing his scheme for the acquisition of the Crimea. Masson makes Patiomkin fear and ultimately poison Lanskoi; this is one of the most reckless statements of that reckless Court chronicler. In reality Lanskoi's removal was a distinct misfortune for Patiomkin, who was first called upon to arouse Catherine out of the profound despair into which she fell over her loss, and next to combat the unwelcome successor who followed Lanskoi. His peace of mind and freedom of action would have been best served by Lanskoi surviving to the end of Catherine's reign.

The death took place at the end of June, 1784, when Lanskoi was but twenty-six, and had spent four years as Catherine's favourite. He was not of a strong constitution, and the life of the Palace had utterly exhausted him. He was said to have, in addition, a weakness for drink. He finally succumbed to a complication of ills, including quinsy and angina

pectoris, apparently; some say scarlet fever Catherine was absolutely prostrated. She would not leave him during his last days, in spite of the doctors' fears that she might contract illness herself. Her throat was actually affected. When the death occurred her collapse was total. She ordered herself to be put to bed, where she remained, indifferent to life or death, and touching no food. She refused to see the Grand Duke and Duchess, who had hurried to Tsarsko Selo as soon as they heard the news. On the 2nd of July she managed to write a letter to Grimm, attempting to find relief from her intolerable pain. She told him:

"I am plunged in the depths of sorrow, and my happiness has fled; I thought that I should die from the irreparable loss, a week ago, of my best friend. I hoped that he would be the support of my old age. He was attentive, he learnt much, he acquired all my tastes. He was a young man whom I was educating, grateful, kind, and good, who shared what sorrows I had and rejoiced in my joys. In a word, it is my unhappiness to tell you that General Lanskoi is no more. . . . Yesterday I got up from bed, but I am so feeble and sorrowful that at present I cannot look on a

human face without being choked with tears. I cannot sleep or eat; to read wearies me, and writing is too much for me. I do not know what will become of me; but I know that never in my life have I been so unhappy as when my kind, my best friend left me."

There is no assumption of grief in this. It was not until a fortnight had passed that she would see anyone. Many in her Court imagined that she would not survive the shock. The doctors were frightened, and, as for State business, it was at an entire standstill. Patiomkin at last induced her to see him, and his visit was beneficial. He joined in her tears, and so persuaded her of his sympathy. She took to reading Zimmermann's new work on "Solitude." The title is suggestive of her state of mind. She planned a mausoleum for Lanskoi's body, and this was actually erected in the grounds of Tsarsko Selo, within sight of her windows. Three months passed before she left the Palace at all. Then suddenly, on a visit from Patiomkin, she reappeared in public, gave audience to the diplomatic body, and was to be seen by all—a widow indeed, but outwardly calm and collected. Had she but stopped so, or had she succumbed to the shock, as she seemed

likely to, her reputation would have been immeasurably greater. We might like to think that it was through her brain being turned with grief that in her last eleven years, from fifty-six to sixty-seven, she took three more favourites, rather below than above the average in merit. But the balance of her mind, well maintained to the very end, forbids this supposition.

Tooke alleges that, at this very time when Catherine was bowed down by the agony of her grief, she consented to marry Patiomkin. He produces no evidence, but says: "It is affirmed by a person highly worthy of credit that the nieces of Prince Patiomkin were in possession of the certificates of the event, and that one of them told him so." Whoever this "person highly worthy of credit" may have been, he may be dismissed. Other writers of the period who know of the report will have none of it. Were it true it would make the subsequent conduct of both Catherine and Patiomkin particularly repulsive, and neither had aught to gain by it. Patiomkin had once entertained the idea, but since 1775 his position had become impregnable. His only strong opponent, the one whom he had never entirely

defeated, Count Panin, had died in 1783. A marriage with his Empress could do no more for him by increasing his power, as it could not be made public[1]; and it will hardly be argued that love prompted such an idea. Patiomkin had abundant love affairs since he ceased to be Imperial favourite, and they continued until his death.

Tooke also makes the accusation against the Princess Dashkof that she wished her son to succeed Lanskoi. This was the son who was born in 1763. The Princess herself records that Gregory Orlof had actually made a similar suggestion to her before Lanskoi's rise, and in her son's presence. Sending her son out of the room she bade Orlof remember that she neither knew nor acknowledged such persons as favourites. "The reply he made me was with his characteristic coarseness, and consequently unworthy of repetition." Tooke's idea

[1] "Is it to be credited," asks Patiomkin's German biographer, "that the bold, the ambitious, the haughty, the despotic Patiomkin, on becoming her husband, should have made no use of the ascendancy which this most striking proof of affection and weakness gave him over her? that there should not have been any change in his conduct? that he should not have availed himself of his rights? and that he should, on the contrary, have hastened to choose her a new favourite?"

is the more to be rejected in that young Dashkof had already married clandestinely and below his station, to his mother's intense disgust. But it may be true, as Tooke and others say, that the Princess Dashkof, who was now in fair favour with Catherine and considered Patiomkin her friend, asked him to secure a post of aide-de-camp to the Empress for one of her nephews, and received the reply that the post had just been filled by M. Yermolof.

Yermolof may have been introduced by Patiomkin, seeing signs of an end approaching of Catherine's period as *veuve décente et affligée*, as Masson styles her. It is sad that her affliction could not keep her faithful to a memory even for a year. For all the intensity of her feeling for Lanskoi she was able to spend the summer of the year following that of his death in gaiety and apparent happiness. As to Yermolof's character there is a conflict of evidence. Masson declares him least amiable of all the favourites; Ségur, though not liking him, did not think him seriously dangerous; Bezborodko, who had a large share in public affairs since Panin's death, thought him modest, refined, and fond of serious study; Tooke describes him as "tall, fair-complexioned, and

of a figure declarative of a soul that could not be roused from apathy"—a curious figure, in truth—but "jealous to an extreme." Yermolof made the error of presuming on Catherine's newly-grown regard for him, and matching it against the hold which Patiomkin had over her. He set himself to undermine the latter, and this proved as fatal an attempt to him as to others before him. Yermolof, in conjunction with Bezborodko and Alexander Voronzof, is said to have urged Catherine that she ought to visit the new territory which Patiomkin had been adding to Russia in the south, and for which he had drawn immense sums from the Treasury. This suggestion was made in order that she should see how Patiomkin had misappropriated the public money for his private use. The Prince, however, persuaded Catherine to let him draw another three million roubles, which he promised to repay very soon, admitting he had not spent all before on the purposes for which the grants had been intended. The conspirators then represented that the pension to the deposed Khan of the Crimea had somehow passed into Patiomkin's hands. Catherine's faith appeared shaken, and there were rumours of the impending downfall of the great minister.

Once more, however, Patiomkin played his cards well. He left St Petersburg for a few days, then suddenly reappeared, when his enemies had begun to triumph, and, forcing his way into Catherine's presence, told her she must choose between him and Yermolof. "So long as you keep that white negro I will not set foot in the Palace." Catherine could not dispense with Patiomkin. Yermolof received orders to travel, and his brief reign was ended. The Empress would not even see him before he left, in spite of his appeals to her. The Court, interested spectators of this curious struggle, saw with astonishment Catherine abandon a favourite of whom she had had no time to grow tired, and who had offended her in no way. The hopelessness of attempting to oust Patiomkin from his position must have struck all. It was not given to any man to do so.

Whether it was the fact or not that the idea of visiting the Crimea was originally suggested to Catherine by Patiomkin's enemies, Patiomkin saw in the idea a magnificent opportunity of developing his plans. But it is necessary to state briefly how it had come about that the Crimea was by now sufficiently incorporated in Russia for the Empress to

visit it as part of her dominions. By the successes of the Russians against the Turks in the early 'seventies the Crimea was lost to Turkey, who by the treaty of Kutchuk Kainardji in 1774 allowed the country's independence, while ceding Kinburn and Azof to Russia. But this independence did not debar Russia from using her influence in the Crimea to a large extent, building towns near the frontiers and attracting settlers to them from the Crimea, and intriguing generally against Turkish interests. Patiomkin, in pursuance of the idea of himself and the Empress of driving the Turks completely out of Europe and setting up a Russo-Greek throne at Constantinople, wished as a preliminary to establish Russia firmly on the Black Sea. For this it was necessary to annex the Crimea. But first an assurance of Austria's benevolence was essential; and Panin's policy, initiated in the brief reign of Peter, and continued in Catherine's reign, in spite of her anti-Prussian declaration at the beginning, had kept Russia aloof from, and even actively hostile to, Austria. All three countries had been united for the first partition of Poland in 1771, but the question of the Bavarian succession was the cause of another

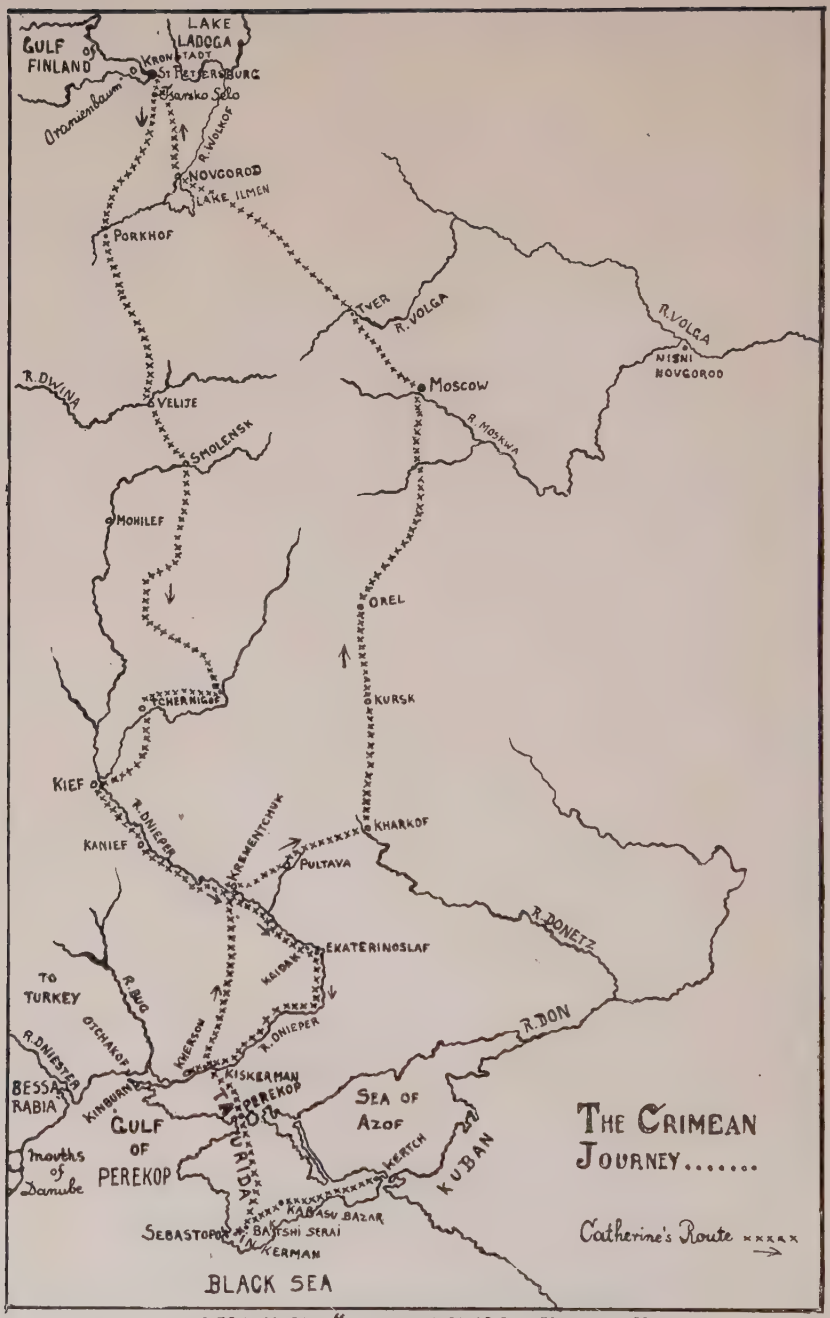
war between Austria and Prussia seven years later. A combination between Russia and France, which was facilitated by Catherine's indignation at England over the matter of English naval pretensions (which led to Russia joining the Armed Neutrality a little later), was followed by a Franco-Russian mediation between Austria and Prussia, which resulted in the Peace of Teschen. Patiomkin now pressed his views with regard to the Crimea on Catherine, who strongly approved. Panin, apparently recognising that a longer struggle was vain, and that Russia and Austria would be drawn together and Prussia alienated, retired in disgust. He lived three years longer, but had no more influence on affairs. The actual work which he had performed fell now to the Vice-chancellor Osterman, while Bezborodko was introduced into the Cabinet. This change was all in favour of Patiomkin. A meeting of the Tsarina and the Emperor Joseph was brought off at Mohilef, and the succeeding visit of Joseph to St Petersburg was so far satisfactory to Russia that an understanding was arrived at against Turkey. Austria, however, was unwilling to make war yet. This did not deter Patiomkin. In 1783

Russian troops entered the Crimea on the pretence of marching through against Turkey, and the annexation of the country followed at once. Turkey protested in vain, and next year signed a treaty recognising the conquest. The Porte was weakened by the lessening of French support, consequent on the drawing nearer of France and Russia.

Patiomkin had triumphed indeed, and his rewards included the government of the new province of Taurida, which enabled him to proceed with his further plans. He was also presented with the title of Taurishefsky and a new mansion at St Petersburg, built for him by the Empress, to which the name of the Tauric Palace was given. Large grants of money were also made to him for the purpose of improving his government, and this was the money which his enemies accused him of diverting. No doubt he did divert it. He had no more scruples about being in debt to the Imperial treasury than to his creditors; and he drew no line between debt and embezzlement. But he did actually proceed to settle the Crimea. Part of the process consisted in massacres of the Tartars who did not submit by his cousin, General Paul Potemkin. By

the massacre of some, and the flight of more, the Tartar population of the peninsula was reduced by half, it was calculated. Prince Potemkin followed this step by introducing more desirable settlers, inviting them from other parts of Europe beside Russia; and by building towns, or at least laying their foundations. His measures were justified to the world by the success which attended them; but at the time they were denounced and ridiculed by his foes. Patiomkin awaited an opportunity of demonstrating to the Empress, to Russia, and to Europe in general, what he had done. It came when the Crimean journey was decided on.

THE CRIMEAN JOURNEY



MAP TO ACCOMPANY "THE COURTSHIPS OF CATHERINE THE GREAT"

CHAPTER VI

THE CRIMEAN JOURNEY

THE journey which Catherine made in the first half of the year 1787, to the Crimea and back, was of so remarkable a nature that it deserves a section to itself. We are fortunate in having two accounts of the adventure, from the pens of two of the most accomplished writers of the period, the Comte de Ségur, who was present all through, and the Prince de Ligne, who attended Catherine the greater part of the time. If there was ever any design against Patiomkin in the first suggestion of a trip to his Government, the plot signally failed. The effect of the journey was an overwhelming victory for Patiomkin himself, as well as a success for Catherine in the eyes of her subjects. It had, too, not really perhaps more by accident than by design of Patiomkin, a momentous political result. Ségur in his Memoirs writes: "None of us foresaw that this triumphal march of the Cleopatra of the North would mark

the epoch of nearly as great fortunes as did the voyage of Cleopatra of Egypt. . . . This tremendous future was hidden from us by a thick veil." He refers to the Russo-Turkish war which followed and, to some extent, arose out of the Russian Empress's tour to her new possessions. We cannot but suspect this to have entered into the dreams of Patiomkin, however little anyone else may have thought of such a sequel. And, without a doubt, Patiomkin well considered what impression would be made on the Austrian Emperor, who was to meet Catherine and accompany her to the Crimea, by all that he would see.

Preparations for the long excursion were made well in advance, and on a great scale. Not the least important were the provisions for the warmth of the travellers during their plunge through the frost. We find Catherine writing to the Prince de Ligne not long before the start: "Far from resembling in my course the brilliant image of the sun which you suggest, we are taking all possible precautions to appear like heavy clouds. Each star that accompanies me is provided with a good thick black pelisse, and, as like all stars my companions desire their furs to have the same cut

as mine, that model has been made the affliction of all." The foreign "stars" whom she invited to accompany her were the French, English, and Austrian Ministers, while of her Court she took Mamonof, the indispensable buffoon and Grand Equerry Narishkin, Count Shuvalof, the Grand Chamberlain, and others, including a number of her maids-of-honour. Her grandsons, Alexander and Constantine, she would have taken but for the latter developing measles; their father, of course, she did not invite. The train, which started from Tsarsko Selo on the 18th of January, 1787, was composed of fourteen carriages and close on two hundred sledges; and at every stage five hundred and sixty horses were waiting. The most unpleasant part of the journey was the beginning. Quite seventeen degrees of frost prevailed, and daylight only lasted six or seven hours. "But," writes Ségur, "in the midst of darkness, we were not left in want of light. At short distances from each other, and on both sides of the road, enormous piles of fir, cypress, birch, and pine, had been raised, and these were set alight; so that we posted along through a range of fires more brilliant than the rays of daylight. It was thus that the proud Empress

of the North, in the midst of the deepest night, commanded that there should be light." Ségur proceeds to describe the scene around them: the vast plains covered with snow, and the forests of firs, whose icicle-clad branches glittered like crystals or diamonds in the sun by day. The blazing road along which they journeyed was, in spite of cold so great that men's beards were stiff with ice, crowded with innumerable citizens and villagers, full of curiosity to see their sovereign and saluting her with acclamations. Through such surroundings they progressed at the rate of about forty miles a day, starting at nine o'clock each morning, halting for a meal in the middle of the day, and stopping for the night at seven o'clock. In the towns they were well lodged, and took their dinner with the Empress; in the villages they had to put up with the accommodation of peasants' houses, in which Ségur complains of heat so great as to render sleep impossible, and of the presence, frequently, of the owner, his wife and family, sleeping on the stove itself. The country through which they passed was not, in truth, prosperous; but, Patiomkin's biographer remarks, the crowds, the bustle, and appearance of prosperity kept Catherine in ignorance of the real

state of things. Of this we shall hear again later. The outward show, at least, was imposing. At the boundary of each successive government the Empress was met by the governor, who escorted her to his farthest limits; and everywhere fresh crowds were to be seen. But Catherine's wish was not more to see, perhaps, than to be seen. "The eye of the master fattens the horse," she quoted to Ségur.

In her care for the entertainment of her party —and the tedium of the journey would certainly have been great without relief — Catherine invited her friends from time to time into her own carriage, to discuss all manner of subjects, including the affairs of her "little household," as she called Russia. Verse-writing, too, was a frequent amusement; of this the Empress was fond, though she was not remarkably proficient at it. Ségur says that her mind seemed to sink under the fatigue of the weary search for rhyme and metre, and tells how Fitzherbert consoled her one day with the remark that none should aim at every distinction, and that she should content herself with those two fine lines composed by her on her dog and her physician (both British, it will be noted) which ran:

Ci-gît la duchesse Anderson,
Qui mordit Monsieur Rogerson.

The "Duchess Anderson," it appears, had once bitten Dr Rogerson; so she has won immortality.[1] A few months later, however, in the Crimea, Catherine made a serious attempt to add to her poetical fame. She shut herself in her room for some hours and finally produced the two following lines:—

Sur le sopha du khan, sur des coussins bourrés,
Dans un kiosque d'or, de grilles entourés.

There is little but local colour to recommend the verses. We must, however, acquit Catherine of being a poetaster; she wrote too little.

The three ministers whom Catherine honoured by taking them in her suite on this unique journey were an instructive contrast. Alleyne Fitzherbert (afterwards Lord St Helens), is described by the Prince de Ligne as the most amiable of Englishmen. He was noted in St Petersburg for that phlegm which was regarded then as the great English characteristic. He

[1] It was, perhaps, on the same dog that Ségur wrote the following verse:—

"Pour prix de sa fidélité
Le ciel, temoin de sa tendresse,
Lui devoit l'immortalité
Pour qu'elle fût toujours auprès de sa maîtresse."

had been sent to St Petersburg in 1783, and left soon after the Crimean journey. He was there at a critical time, for England was strongly supporting the policy of Prussia, whereas Russia was drawing steadily closer to Austria. One of Fitzherbert's duties was to arrange a commercial treaty with Russia; but Catherine's growing resentment against England induced her to put delays in the way of this, while commercial treaties with both France and Austria were signed readily. But, in spite of her anti-English policy now, Catherine appears to have had a regard for Fitzherbert, and she was not offended at his habit of saying what he thought. At Kief she asked the three diplomatists what they thought of her town. Count Cobentzel, the Austrian, replied: "Madam, it is the most beautiful, imposing, and magnificent city I ever beheld." "It is a dull place," said Fitzherbert, "with nothing but ruins and shabby houses." Ségur, who tells the story, said: "Madame, in Kief I recognise both the presence and the promise of a great city." He was satisfied that his remark pleased Catherine most.

Count Cobentzel was sent to St Petersburg by Maria Theresa, and confirmed in his post by her two successors, being very popular at the

Russian Court. He is described as of an unattractive and unwieldy figure, but of a witty disposition. His great passion was the stage, and dramatic entertainments were constant at his house, wherein he took part with credit. During the Franco-Austrian War which broke out in 1792 he refused to stop his theatricals on account of unfavourable despatches. Catherine, somewhat annoyed, remarked: "You will see he is keeping his best piece for the news of the French entry into Vienna."

To the Comte Louis Philippe de Ségur Catherine's biographers are under a debt of gratitude; for his Memoirs contain some of the most interesting information there is about her. He was an enthusiast touching her, it is true, but it is precisely on such testimony as his that we must rank her so much higher than the chroniclers of scandal would allow if we listened to them alone. We cannot read Ségur without recognising that he was an honourable gentleman, who related the truth as it appeared to him. He might be blind to Catherine's failings, but he did not lie about them. Catherine treated him with a full measure of her friendship —he came originally to St Petersburg with an introduction from her confidant Grimm in 1784

—and her attitude toward France grew much warmer while Ségur represented that country. The French Revolution, unfortunately, altered her opinion of France entirely, and also estranged her from Ségur, who, to her disgust, accepted the Republican form of Government.[1] Ségur is an able and fascinating writer, and to his personal character his friend the Prince de Ligne bears witness. The Prince describes him in an amusing and amiable passage. He had a touch of genius, he said, and looked like a sylph. He had "very little human nature, no desires, no passions, and, I fear, no pleasures, though he suffers pain." When Ségur first went to Paris from his home there was a phenomenon observed, but not an alarming one. "It was not a comet, for instead of a tail it had a rather ill-made queue; it was not an aurora borealis, for it shone by day as well as by night; not an *ignis-fatuus*, for it was much too wise to lead, or to be led, astray; not a planet, for it did not revolve round anyone; nor a star, because, fortunately for the nations of Europe, it was not fixed to its own spot."

[1] He went further than his brother, the Vicomte Joseph de Ségur, who complained pathetically that "the Revolution had spoilt his Paris."

The route lay by way of Porkhof and Smolensk, to Kief, which was reached on the 9th of February, and where preparations were made for a stay of a month or so. At this capital of the old Tsars of Russia there was awaiting a crowd of visitors from all parts of Europe, and deputations arrived from every quarter of Catherine's Empire—Cossacks, Tartars, Khirghiz, Calmucks, Georgians, Crimeans, and others. "It was," Ségur declares, "the whole East congregated to see the modern Semiramis receiving the homage of all the monarchs of the West." Little time was free for inspection of the place, for balls, dinners, and Court ceremonies generally kept all fully occupied. Prince Patiomkin had not yet appeared; he was still preparing to make the entry of his Sovereign into his own government something which should surpass all she had yet seen. But his nieces, the Princesses Branitsky and Skavronsky, who had both married Polish nobles, were at Kief to receive Catherine, and to introduce to her numbers of the Polish nobility. Poles, indeed, were there in crowds; certainly more from fear than from affection, remarks Ségur. The Russian Viceroy of Poland, Count Stackelburg, was also present, to remind them of their fall, and Suvarof, the "hero of des-

potism." At length Patiomkin arrived, bringing with him the Prince of Nassau-Siegen, who had just entered the Russian service. The appearance from Vienna of the Prince de Ligne completed the party. Like the Comte de Ségur, the last-named, if he were to receive a due return from a biographer of Catherine for the services which he conferred, would demand far more space than can be given to him in this book. To this brilliant cosmopolitan (Frenchman in Austria, Austrian in France, and either in Russia, he says himself) we owe the most charming sketches of his contemporaries. If his pen ran away with him, as his friend Ségur complained, and his enthusiasm for his subjects biassed him, the vividness and modernity of his work is ample compensation. Grimm found him insincere, but Sainte-Beuve's high estimate of him seems juster. There is no more delightful writer of the time than this man who would never be more than twenty, and who seemed to live up to his own saying that "the happiest days are those which have a long morning and a short evening."[1]

[1] We have Catherine's testimony that the Prince de Ligne's letters were among the few that she considered "as good to read as to receive"—that is, we may presume, they had a permanent value.

From the day of his arrival Patiomkin took up a position to which even Catherine was but second. Before he joined the assemblage at Kief his numerous enemies had been busy trying to undermine his position—an attempt little likely to succeed with Catherine. From the moment of his appearance on the scene, however, all was changed. Nothing but praises could be heard, nothing seen but obsequious homage. Assuming the part of host he began a series of entertainments, which continued all the time of the halt at Kief. At one he is said to have exhibited a single firework which cost forty thousand roubles. Catherine could, indeed, see that her favourite spent lavishly the money which she so lavishly bestowed on him. She let herself easily enjoy the spectacle of what the extraordinary man of her choice, the "Force of Nature,"[1] could do. But entertainments in her own name were plentiful. Full Courts were held once or twice a week, with grand balls and concerts alternately. On other days the favoured visitors passed the evenings with Catherine, who then no longer allowed either restraint or etiquette. "The Empress disappeared," says the French chronicler of the Crimean journey, "and only an amiable woman

[1] So M. Waliszewski aptly calls Patiomkin.

was seen; we told stories, played billiards, and talked on literature." And here again verse-making was eagerly practised. The Prince de Ligne was a great acquisition, according to Ségur, for he excelled at anecdote and extempore songs.

Nothing is more characteristic of Patiomkin's violently mingled character than his conduct at this period of Catherine's stay at Kief. While outwardly his life was all ostentatious magnificence, in the midst of which he was a dazzling figure, the most splendidly uniformed and bejewelled, in his own house he was, if not less the centre of all, at least a very different object to the eye. Fortunately we have a minute description of him at such times by the Comte de Ségur. At Patiomkin's palace at Petchersky, says the French writer, you might think yourself present at an audience of the Vizier of Constantinople, Bagdad, or Cairo. Silence and fear of a kind reigned. Patiomkin, who had but recently been resplendent in the grand uniform of a Marshal, smothered in decorations and diamonds, covered with lace and embroidery, and with his hair all powdered and curled, was now to be seen in a dressing-gown, with neck bare, legs half-naked, feet in large slippers, hair ill combed,

lying effeminately stretched on a vast sofa. Around him would be a crowd of officers, high dignitaries of the Empire, and foreign visitors. Patiomkin, playing chess perhaps, would not notice them, and might not even invite them to be seated. Ségur, anxious to maintain the dignity of the representative of France, was wont to treat him with the greatest familiarity, to the astonishment of the others present; but the treatment was evidently right, for Patiomkin not only took no offence but admitted Ségur to the greatest intimacy. And in his immediate circle, with the crowd of courtiers no longer there to be impressed or disdained, Patiomkin, if not mending his dress, at least mended his manners, talking on all sorts of subjects with wit and originality.

Patiomkin's friendliness to the French Minister was in keeping with Catherine's graciousness to the same diplomatist, which she manifested freely before and during most of the journey. The Empress and her great adviser, or inspirer, both desired a good understanding with France, as well as Austria. The foreign policy of the early part of Catherine's reign, which, under the management of Count Panin, had been hostile to those two countries, had since altered

entirely, and was now more to Catherine's own taste. Patiomkin was dreaming of an alliance with France, and hinted as much to Ségur. Austria was quite willing to assist Russian aspirations to set up a Christian State centred at Constantinople — the "Greek project," as some historians call it. But France, for commercial reasons, desired the continuance of Turkey's independence. The Prince de Ligne records that he asked Ségur at this period what was the reason of France's "mania for protecting such ignorant people and such bad company as the Turks"; whereon Ségur replied: "The balance of Europe; justice, since the Turks give no real ground for complaint; French commerce with Smyrna; the Levant ports—good enough reasons, it seems to me." It was useless for Patiomkin to argue that a Christian government or Greek republic would suit French traders better than Turkish rule. Ségur detected a sudden coolness toward him on the part of Catherine now. He suspected English influence being at work against France, but he had nothing to say against Fitzherbert. The influence in question seems rather to have been used at Constantinople than in Russia.

The winter was now over, and a change was

to be made in the character of the journey. A grand cannonade announced the breaking-up of the ice on the Dnieper, and a flotilla lay ready to convey Catherine and her Court to the Black Sea. On the 1st of May, 1787, she started southward on her galley, followed by over eighty vessels. At the head of this stateliest fleet that a great river had ever borne Ségur describes seven galleys of elegant form and majestic size, beautifully painted, and manned by uniformed crews. A band of twelve musicians was on each ship. The cabins are depicted, by both Ségur and the Prince de Ligne, as splendidly upholstered. The money showered on him by Catherine had not been spared by Patiomkin. He did not forget, either, that the travellers had eyes for the shore. "There appeared on the banks of the river curious and admiring crowds, from all parts of the Empire, to gaze at the splendid retinue, and to present to their Sovereign the products of their various climes. On the plains Cossacks manœuvred, while here and there stood triumphal arches, and garlands and architectural decorations beautified villages, houses, and cottages until they were transformed into superb cities and palaces." Such is Ségur's florid description, abbreviated. Pati-

omkin was accused, by his contemporaries and by later writers, of practically manufacturing the scenery, with intent to deceive. His anonymous biographer (who allows that many of the houses and villages had but just been built, that the distant buildings were said to be merely fronts, that parks were laid out for the occasion, and that the population was moved on from place to place) thinks that Catherine was probably the confidante, not the dupe, of Patiomkin. The Prince de Ligne suggests that the Russians who were vexed at not being invited on the journey pretended that the travellers were both deceived and deceiving, and that "cardboard villages had been set up along the route, that the ships and cannons were painted models, the cavalry horseless, and so on." He adds: "I know very well what is trickery. For instance, the Empress, who cannot run about on foot as we do, is made to believe that towns for which she has given the necessary money are finished, whereas they are often towns without streets, streets without houses, houses without roof, door, or window. The Empress sees nothing but the shops built with free-stone, and the colonnades of the Governor-General's palaces." The Prince testifies, however, to seeing with his

own eyes superb establishments in their infancy, growing industries, villages with regular streets, surrounded with trees, and well watered. It is impossible not to conclude that Catherine was but partly deceived, that there was a solid substratum of reality under all that she and her guests saw, and that Patiomkin had used some of the enormous revenues which were his for the purposes for which he had received them. But at the same time, with a magnificent kind of effrontery, he filled in or covered up all the deficiencies, as though he had been dealing with a theatre instead of a country. The Force of Nature made use of all the resources of art. It was a splendidly picturesque achievement, but it was not to be expected that it would appeal to his enemies' imaginations.

The voyage continued without incident to Kanief, where the Polish King Stanislas Augustus was expecting them. Catherine's former lover had been waiting three months, and had expended three million livres, it was symmetrically remarked, to see her for three hours. They had not met since Poniatowsky, the recalled ambassador, left St Petersburg in 1759. Since that date Catherine had secured him a crown; it was probably about the pre-

servation of that crown, and the realm attached to it, that he chiefly desired the meeting now. Intrigues against him were busy, and it was only by Russia's favour that he could hope to keep his throne for himself, and for his country that vestige of independence which was left. His task was at least partly successful. He counteracted, for a time, the plots against him. As a solace, perhaps, for his patient waiting, he also received from Catherine's treasury a present of one hundred thousand roubles.

The meeting of the King and Empress was, indeed, a curious affair. Stanislas, to avoid the restrictions of etiquette, was incognito. The Prince de Ligne speaks of the inexpressible charm of his beautiful face, and the soft tones of his voice, as he stepped on board the Empress's galley, and said to the courtiers awaiting him: "Gentlemen, the King of Poland has charged me to present to you Count Poniatowsky." Half-an-hour's private conversation with Catherine followed, at the end of which they rejoined the company. Ségur noticed embarrassment and unusual restraint on the part of Catherine, and in the eyes of the King a certain sadness, which was not entirely concealed by an affected smile. A banquet followed, on

a sumptuous scale, which doubtless relieved the Empress of her embarrassment; such entertainments are poor aids to sentiment. The scene at the end, when Stanislas seized the only opportunity which was offered him, became famous. He had mislaid his hat. Catherine saw it, and had it brought to him. He turned to her to whom he owed his crown, and said: "Ah! madame, you once give me a much better one." Catherine's Court went ashore to attend a ball, but Catherine was not present, nor could Stanislas persuade her to stay twenty-four hours longer at Kanief. The time for favours was gone by with him, says Ségur; and he adds: "Thus terminated an interview which, for all its theatrical magnificence, will better occupy a place in history than in romance, since assuredly it was not embellished by any excess of tender feeling." Catherine, at least, had given no ground for the grief and jealousy displayed by the favourite Mamonof at the thought of the meeting of Catherine and her lover of twenty-seven years ago. Mamonof's outburst caused great amusement to Ségur and the Prince de Ligne; for was not Catherine at least thirty-five years his senior?

Apart from her unwillingness to revive an

old passion, she had another reason for hastening. There was to come the meeting with the Emperor Joseph, to which she and Patiomkin attached great importance. But first the great minister had a few more sights for his mistress to see. At Krementchuk she found a house specially built to please her, surrounded by one of her favourite English gardens, with trees of enormous size, transplanted at great expense. A large gathering of the nobility and merchants of the neighbourhood received her. Moreover, twelve thousand cavalry were drawn up for her to review, including a new regiment of cuirassiers, raised by Patiomkin. Catherine did not conceal her satisfaction; and a letter is extant from her to the Governor of St Petersburg in which she desires him to stop the cavils of Patiomkin's enemies, who accused him of spending otherwise the money destined for the troops. Patiomkin had indeed an ascendancy now which was little to be wondered at. Ségur pays a tribute to his inconceivable address, and to his "ability, as if by a miracle, to cope with every obstacle, to overcome nature, shorten distances, to deceive the eye as to the dulness of sandy plains, and the mind as to the tedium of a long journey, and to give a semblance of life and fertility to

the barren desert." The fleet only anchored in picturesque situations, where could be seen groups of peasants on the banks, and herds and flocks on the plains, while boats full of young men and girls entertained the travellers with song. Though the Empress and her party may have been but half deceived by the invariable aspect of prosperity and industry, the sensation of lending themselves to the spells of the magician Patiomkin was doubtless agreeable.

Though it had been arranged that Joseph and Catherine should meet at Kherson, near the mouth of the Dnieper, the Austrian Emperor had hastened on to Kaidak, where he fell in with Catherine on the 18th May. He was travelling again as Count Falkenstein, and had no retinue with him when they met. Catherine had come ashore attended by Patiomkin, his nephew Branitsky, and the Prince of Nassau. In consequence, when the meeting took place, at the solitary house of a Cossack, those three nobles had to turn cooks; the repast was said to have been as detestable as might have been expected. When they had been joined by their attendants and the rest of the party the voyage continued to the site of Catherine's intended city of Ekaterinoslaf, whence the journey to

Kherson was made overland. At Kherson, again, was a great assemblage to see Catherine, both of her own subjects and of foreigners drawn by curiosity. Patiomkin had prepared the place well to dazzle the visitors. He is recorded, in particular, to have seen that the shops were kept fully stocked with merchandise and all that could give the impression of flourishing trade. The port, too, was crowded, and it was arranged that the launching of three Russian warships should take place while the Empress was there. And in pursuance of his plan Patiomkin took care that Catherine should see an archway over which was written the inscription: "This is the way to Byzantium."

Patiomkin never lost sight of one great object which he had in this Crimean excursion of the Empress, to bring about the expulsion of the Turks from Constantinople. As far as the effect on Catherine, already long a supporter of the scheme, was concerned all fell out excellently. Especially appropriate, though unrehearsed, was the incident which occurred when the Russian fleet reached the mouth of the Dnieper. Catherine would have liked to inspect the Turkish shore, but a dozen Turkish war-vessels came out and stationed themselves

"very uncivilly," as the Prince de Ligne comments, across the river. Catherine could not conceal her annoyance. She called for a map, and flicked with her finger-nail at the name of Otchakof, the stronghold of the Turks, not speaking, but smiling an ominous smile. Patiomkin would have no difficulty in gaining her assent to a war. But it was important to have the co-operation of Austria, even if the sympathy of France was unobtainable. Nothing was left undone to impress the Emperor Joseph. And personally Joseph could not have made a more amiable return to the advances. His subject, the Prince de Ligne, enthusiastically declares that "the monarch enchanted all who saw him" and that, "free from the cares of his Empire, he made the happiness of his friends by his social qualities." Nevertheless, it was a grave step to undertake a war against Turkey in conjunction with the Russians, for the brunt of the fighting must fall on the country which bordered on Turkey. Ségur, who had many intimate conversations with the Emperor, gathered that he was little disposed to second Catherine's ambitions. He did not refuse, nor did he leave her company, in spite of the fact that he now received news of the revolt in the

Netherlands. He could not be brought to engage himself definitely to make war; yet next year he was found fighting on Russia's side, as Patiomkin wished.

The actual visit to the Crimea itself was now beginning, and the travellers proceeded by way of Perekop to Baktshi-Serai, the capital of the late khans of the Crimea. Catherine is said to have been anticipating with proud delight the opportunity of seating herself on a Mussulman throne conquered by her arms. The pleasure was at last hers; and the whole party lodged in the Khans' Palace, a splendid building, whose mixture of Moorish, Arabic, Chinese, and Turkish styles, paintings, gildings, inscriptions, fountains, and gardens impressed the Prince de Ligne greatly. He records the haughty boast in the great audience hall, inscribed in letters of gold: "In defiance of envy, the whole world is told that there is naught as rich as this in Ispahan, Damascus, or Stamboul." Five days were passed at Baktshi-Serai, and then a journey was made to Inkerman, that Catherine might review Patiomkin's Euxine fleet, built and equipped in the space of two years. Ségur says that it seemed quite incomprehensible that Prince Patiomkin should have been able in this

time, at a distance of eight hundred leagues from St Petersburg, and in a country so recently conquered, to build a town, raise a fleet, make forts, and get together so many inhabitants. "It was a prodigious display of activity."

This activity was continued throughout the stay in the Crimea. Describing the travelling in that region, the Prince de Ligne says that for days they crossed vast solitary tracts, from which the Tartar tribes had been driven. Everywhere were furnished magnificent tents for meals and as bedrooms. Deserts had been transformed already into fields, groves, and villages, and all that was wanted was that their present military inhabitants should give place to peaceful peasants. These latter Patiomkin had begun to attract to his government. Even an English farmer had been induced to come out, and his daughters, "two heavenly figures," were met by, and gave breakfast to, the Prince de Ligne. Nor did Patiomkin leave his guests to admire only his mastery over nature; he entertained them with military spectacles, Tartar evolutions, and with firework-displays on a vast scale. Of these last named the most magnificent was shown at Karasu Bazar. It is described as taking Catherine by surprise as

she strolled out to take the air after dinner. The sun was just disappearing, when suddenly all the hills for five miles around were lighted up by three lines of coloured fire; while on a conical hill in the centre appeared Catherine's cypher, surmounting which was a huge firework, crowned with an explosion of one hundred thousand rockets.

In spite of the splendour and excitement we feel bound to sympathise with the Prince de Ligne and his companions on one point. The fault was not Patiomkin's. The Austrian Prince cannot speak well of the meals at Catherine's table in the Crimea. He wrote to his friend, the Marquise de Coigny (to whom all his descriptions of the journey are addressed): "I am dying of hunger, for everything is cold and detestable at the Empress's table. She never sits long there, and if she has anything agreeable or useful to say she says it so slowly that nothing is hot except the water we drink." With reference to the last remark, it may be explained that summer was coming on.

After a visit to the eastern Crimea Catherine was warned that the unhealthiness of the season made further stay inadvisable. Moreover, she was wanted at St Petersburg again. The party,

therefore, turned northward, and on the 22nd of July Tsarsko Selo was reached, by way of Krementchuk, Pultava, Kursk, Orel, and Moscow. The Emperor Joseph left them on the outskirts of the Crimea, on the best of terms. At Pultava Patiomkin bade farewell to his guests, who stopped for some fêtes in Moscow before the journey finished. To all who accompanied her Catherine presented a medal, with her profile on one side and a map of the tour on the reverse.

So ended this "long and singular journey," according to Ségur; "one of the most beautiful dreams of his life" the courtier Prince de Ligne called it, writing to Catherine.[1]

[1] The journey cost Patiomkin seven million roubles.

THE DEATH OF PATIOMKIN

CHAPTER VII

THE DEATH OF PATIOMKIN

Dmitrief Mamonof, the favourite whom Catherine had taken with her on the Crimean journey, was about twenty-four years of age when he was assigned the post from which Yermolof had been so summarily removed. He had been thought of as a possible candidate when Yermolof was chosen. Patiomkin seems to have selected him as one who promised no danger to his own position. The story is that he sent Mamonof to the Empress with some pictures, her verdict on which was to convey to him her opinion about the bearer. She sent the answer that "the outlines were good, but the colouring poor." M. Waliszewski makes her apply a similar remark to a portrait of Mamonof. The two versions come to much the same. Contemporaries agree that the description suited well enough: that there was something lacking about his beauty. Catherine, however, accepted him, and soon became enthusiastic about

his mind. He was a second Lanskoi to her, and he had started with a better education. He came of a very good family, and even the Prince de Ligne admitted him to be well bred. The Emperor Joseph, who, like the Prince, met Mamonof on the Crimean journey, is kinder to his looks than to his brains, for he thought him destitute of any particular intelligence, and out of his element in the Court. Yet the Comte de Ségur, who was among the cleverest men at that Court, had a better opinion of him. His tastes were at least refined. He was fond of the arts, particularly music, and he even wrote plays, in whose non-survival he is, perhaps, fortunate. But he was extremely extravagant, and the drain of his exactions and Patiomkin's combined was soon felt. Catherine had given both permission to draw on her private treasurer when they desired. The result was that the imperial coffers were shortly five million roubles in debt. Catherine reprimanded the treasurer, who produced a heap of drafts from Patiomkin and Mamonof. Mamonof, remonstrated with, treated the affair as a joke, and nothing further was said about it.

The Russian finances had, however, been reduced to a desperate state by various causes,

of which the upkeep of the favourite was no small item. Patiomkin's war against Turkey was costing heavy sums, whose size was increased by the Prince's peculiar method of dealing with his country's money. On the top of all came a declaration of war from Sweden, where Gustavus III., unable to tolerate Russian intrigues any longer, seized the favourable opportunity in 1788, when all Russia's troops were engaged in the south, to march into Russia. St Petersburg was terribly alarmed. This war was at its doors. Catherine wrote to the Prince de Ligne at the time: "It is to the sound of cannon, which shakes the windows of my home, that your Imperturbable writes to you." Yet she showed that the Prince de Ligne had made no mistake in giving her that name of "Imperturbable." Eight thousand men, however badly armed, were sent into Finland; and disaffection was produced in the ranks of the Swedish army, where many of the officers were of the Diet's party, and hostile to the King. The Russian fleet, too, more than held its own in the Baltic. "Have I done well, my master?" wrote Catherine to Patiomkin.

Patiomkin was far from agreeing that it was well. He was indignant against Catherine and

her councillors for undertaking a second war, even though it might be "an old woman's war," as he contemptuously called it. This was not a reference to Catherine's age but to the quality of the troops needed to keep back the Swedes. He had, however, the gratification of seeing now one of the fruits of the Crimean journey of the previous year—Austria declaring war against the Turks, and joining Russia on the Danube. Thus reinforced, Russia maintained the two wars successfully. But the Austrian alliance, which practically meant a triple alliance between Russia, Austria, and France, led Prussia, now under Frederick William II., to form a Germanic counter-league, which included Holland and England, the latter partly because the English King was elector of Hanover and partly in continuance of the long alliance with Frederick the Great. What Panin feared, therefore, had come to pass—but it was as Patiomkin willed.

Catherine now received a personal blow, which affected her far more than the loss of Prussia's friendship, for which there were, after all, compensations. The wound inflicted on her pride by Mamonof was the worst she ever suffered except that dealt by Rimsky Korsakof. Her

two musical lovers were alike in their unfaithfulness. In the autumn of 1788 Catherine noticed a growing aloofness on the part of Mamonof. He talked to her of his bad chest, made excuses for withdrawing from her company, and even alleged religious scruples about the life which he was living. But the rupture did not occur until the summer of the next year. It was on the 18th of June that Mamonof came to the Empress and complained of her coldness. This attack did not take her by surprise. According to her own story, which she confided to her private secretary, she answered him that he knew well how it was since September last, and how much she had suffered. "You have for a long time now paid no attention to what I say. But, since a separation is necessary, I will look after your future." She followed this up by sending him a note, which assured him on his retirement a brilliant position, and at the same time the idea occurred to her of a marriage with Count Bruce's daughter. (She was a child of thirteen, but, says Catherine, already mature.) Mamonof at once came to Catherine, trembling, and told her that he was in love with the Princess Sherbatof, one of her maids-of-honour, and had promised her marriage

half-a-year ago. "Imagine my feelings!" appealed Catherine to her secretary.

Catherine's Court, too, might imagine her feelings, but it was at a loss to explain her conduct towards the favourite who had thus insulted her. She had shown so great an attachment to him that all thought that he had stepped into the unfortunate Lanskoi's place, and that Sasha's[1] rule would last her lifetime, for she was sixty years old now. Masson says that her pride and generosity were sufficient to make her grant Mamonof's desire. At any rate she arranged for his marriage with the Princess Sherbatof to take place without delay. She superintended the dressing of the bride in her own rooms in the Palace, and loaded the bridegroom with presents. She "hoped they would be happy." She only insisted that they should go and live in Moscow; at which Mamonof appears to have been hurt. He had a strange way of looking at things.

In spite of Catherine's high estimate of Mamonof before she discovered his treachery to her—and she went so far as to talk to Grimm

[1] Sasha, or Sashenka, was the familiar name which Catherine had given Mamonof, and by which she used to call him in letters to her intimates, as to Patiomkin.

about his "uprightness"—it is impossible not to regard him as among the most unpleasant of all the favourites. That he could assume so well the position with regard to the Empress, who was more than double his age, as to excite notice by his jealousy of Poniatowsky and Bezborodko (towards whom Catherine's attitude was solely one of esteem for his talents), was hardly to his credit. For his remaining at the Palace while under promise to marry one who afterwards became his wife no one but Catherine could find pardon. The regrets he afterwards expressed for his folly made him more contemptible. His well-bred manners cannot carry off the baseness of his conduct. Patiomkin, after Mamonof's fall, professed not to be surprised, and declared him "a very Narcissus, expecting all and giving nothing in return." But Patiomkin had least reason to complain of him, since he had refrained from political intrigue, and had not tried to shake the position of the great minister. The latter's German biographer, it is true, makes him attempt to get rid of Mamonof on account of an assumption of equality in position. Catherine, however, according to this chronicler, refused to dismiss her favourite, who, for his part, urged her to

"appease Patiomkin's wrath by lavishing on him the most flattering marks of approval and distinction." Patiomkin still refused to leave St Petersburg, lingering on until May, when he was obliged to rejoin the army, exacting from the Empress a promise that she would not make Mamonof Vice-Chancellor, as she was suspected of being anxious to do. Patiomkin had only been gone a month when the fall of the favourite, which even his influence could not procure, was brought about as stated above. Such an addition to the account seems unnecessary.

One story is told of Mamonof and his wife after their departure to Moscow. Mamonof, it was said, was so imprudent as to talk to his wife about the Empress; and the young woman was more imprudent still, in that she did not keep to herself what she heard. One night the police entered their house at Moscow, and six of them, dressed as women, soundly whipped the wife, while the husband was forced to kneel down and watch the proceedings. After their task was done Catherine's avengers left, saying to Mamonof: "This is the way the Empress punishes a first indiscretion. For the second there is Siberia." The tale is given by

Tooke. It does not convey a high idea of impartial justice, seeing that Mamonof was only made to suffer the mental, his wife the physical, pain. But Catherine could not bring herself to treat Mamonof as he deserved to be treated. The utmost she could do was to insist on his remaining at Moscow. She relaxed even this rule later; but by that time Zubof had been in the favourite's rooms in the Palace for nearly four years, and Mamonof declined to visit St Petersburg.

On the day of Mamonof's marriage to the Princess Sherbatof a lieutenant in the Guards, on duty at Tsarsko Selo at the time, was assigned the rooms just vacated. Plato Zubof was twenty-two years of age, and was the second of four brothers, three of them soldiers, like their father. The family was remotely connected with the Saltikofs, by whom, according to some accounts, Plato was brought to Catherine's notice. According to others it was Anna Narishkin, sister-in-law of Leof Narishkin, and a close friend of Catherine as early as the days of Poniatowsky, who came to her Empress's assistance. The young man was duly installed, and another sum of ten thousand roubles was taken from the exhausted Treasury as a present. Catherine did not consult Patiomkin on this occasion, nor

do we hear of her sending him a consolatory gift as usual. The Prince was far distant, conducting still the operations against the Turks. When the news reached him his indignation was great. He may have had an unfavourable opinion already of Plato Zubof, or he may not have known who he was until letters from St Petersburg reached him. But he knew how much easier it was for a favourite to gain an ascendancy over the sixty-year-old Catherine than it had been ten or twenty years ago. He wrote, and begged Catherine to get rid of Zubof, to find some other favourite; Catherine hardly reassured him by insisting, in her replies, on Zubof's childlike nature and his amiability and grace. The Prince even made a pun on his rival's name, which he took care should reach the Empress's ears. He had a tooth (*zubof*), he said, which was troubling him, and he would not be easy until it were removed. But Catherine refused to gratify his wish. Zubof was favourite when Patiomkin came to St Petersburg a year and a half later, and he held the post still when Patiomkin died. He was, indeed, the last of the favourites.

The war with Turkey occupied the greater part of Patiomkin's attention during the four

last years of his life. M. Rambaud, in his "History of Russia," says that Patiomkin was taken by surprise by the Turkish declaration of war in 1787, and that in his despair he was ready even to abandon the Crimea, until Catherine inspired him with the courage to persevere. It is difficult to see how he can have been surprised. Everything had been done to irritate the Turks. The Crimea had been seized and absorbed. Russia had built a Black Sea fleet. Russian troops were massed in large numbers in the south. Some sort of understanding had been arrived at with Austria, it was evident. The ambition to set up a nominally Greek kingdom, with Constantinople as its capital, was well known, both in Patiomkin and in his mistress. The Turks had only been held back for some years by the growing coolness of French friendship. If Patiomkin had been taken aback by the tardy activity of the Porte he would have had no excuse. But it is impossible to believe that he was. He appears, on the contrary, to have taken every step to precipitate a conflict as soon as the Empress was safely back in St Petersburg. An excuse was soon to hand. The Turks presented an ultimatum exposing their grievances. Russia

refused to remedy them, and the Russian Minister at Constantinople was at once thrown into prison. Patiomkin proceeded without delay to the siege of Oczakof, while Rumianzof was sent into Moldavia. Oczakof offered a desperate resistance, and was not captured until December, 1788, when, in addition to the eight thousand Turks who lost their lives during the siege, the whole town was put to the sword, regardless of sex or age. Patiomkin's reward was the order of St George, the only Russian order he had not yet received, and a sword set with brilliants. He spent the rest of the winter at St Petersburg, where he was received with six miles of illuminations and a salute of guns on a scale previously only accorded to sovereigns, and was entertained with a continuous round of Court festivities. It is now that he is alleged to have made the unsuccessful attempt to get Mamonof dismissed. He returned to the front in May without any apparent decline in influence.

The war continued in favour of Russia, though the expenses demanded by Patiomkin were enormous. The capture of Bender provided another excuse for extraordinary honours to Patiomkin, who had now secured the retire-

ment of Rumianzof altogether, and was able to take to himself the whole credit for successes. Bender brought him a hundred thousand roubles, a laurel crown made of emeralds, and an issue of commemorative medals. The campaign of 1790 resulting in further triumphs, negotiations for peace were begun at Jassy. Russia was tired of the war, in which, since the death of Joseph II. early in the year, she had to fight single-handed. The constant demands for money by Patiomkin wearied even Catherine, who found it impossible to raise adequate loans in Europe; yet he showed no honest desire for peace. Correspondence between Minister and Sovereign became difficult, and Patiomkin determined to come to the capital himself. He appeared in St Petersburg, for the last visit he was ever to pay, early in March, 1791. He had again a magnificent reception—so gracious and flattering, indeed, on the part of the Empress, says his biographer, that expert courtiers thought they perceived some affectation in her manners and expressions. The long absence of Patiomkin, continues the writer, had produced the usual effects of absence. "Men rarely stand this ordeal; women never." But Catherine's consideration for him showed no

outward signs of diminution, and Patiomkin conducted himself with all his former pride and contempt for others. He made no attempt to conciliate Zubof. He lived in the most reckless and extravagant manner, although his health was now suffering severely from the strain to which throughout his life he subjected it. His excesses had, perhaps, really brought about a weakening of that gigantic will-power, by which, for nearly twenty years, he had imposed himself on his country and its ruler. At any rate, for five months he appeared to forget entirely his ambition, and to abandon himself to a carnival of pleasure. His conduct was, no doubt, partly directed to proving to the world that he still was as powerful and as unrestrained as ever. One tremendous effort which he made to eclipse his former triumphs and the displays of his rivals made a deep impression, as is evident from the attention devoted to it by contemporaries. The Tauric Palace, Catherine's present to him in memory of his greatest achievement, was given up to an entertainment to the Empress on a scale not yet attempted. The various accounts dwell on the month of preparation, the army of artists, and the constant rehearsals. Besides

the Empress, the whole Court and the foreign representatives were his guests. Patiomkin received Catherine at the door, dressed in scarlet and gold, and blazing with diamonds; so heavy with jewels was his hat that it was carried by an aide-de-camp. A symphony by three hundred musicians commenced the entertainment; a masquerade ballet followed, in which the Grand Dukes Alexander and Constantine took the lead. Next came a display in the theatre, ending in an Asiatic procession, in which the various costumes of the subject nations were introduced. The whole Palace was then thrown open, and the final act was a supper to the six hundred guests, at which all the table service was of gold and silver. The thought strikes one, as one reads the glowing descriptions, that all this brilliance was rather of the pantomimic kind; but it was well designed to produce its effect. Catherine exhibited her pleasure by staying until after midnight, which was contrary to her usual custom. As she was preparing to leave a hymn in her honour was given by picked musicians. She was so affected, says one of the accounts, that she turned round to Patiomkin to express her satisfaction. "He,

overpowered by the strong feeling of what he owed to Her Majesty, fell on his knee, and, seizing her hand, bedewed it with tears. It was the last time he should ever, on that spot, stammer out his respect and gratitude to his bountiful Sovereign."

The departure of Patiomkin from St Petersburg was at length made necessary in his eyes by the fact that Prince Repnin, who, commanded in his absence, had pressed the campaign against the Turks with vigour and success. Patiomkin could not see another general gathering the fame which might have been his. Moreover, the Turks now showed an inclination to accept terms which before they would have rejected, and the preliminaries of peace were actually agreed upon. There was plainly no time to be lost. Though he was still in a very bad state of health, Patiomkin hastened south. His arrival at Jassy found his bodily condition alarming. Catherine despatched physicians to him; but he would take no advice. He drank heavily, and would agree to no diet. Finally, he determined to leave Jassy for Oczakof on the 15th October, 1791, and started out in his carriage at three in the morning. He grew rapidly worse, and in a

few hours' time stopped the carriage, and had himself taken out, gasping for breath. He died under a tree on the high road, in the arms of a favourite niece, the Princess Branitsky.

The effect of the news of Patiomkin's death on Catherine was sufficient to silence all who thought that she had been estranged from her former favourite and her minister for seventeen years. She fell immediately into a faint, and, after coming to, relapsed twice. She was bled repeatedly, after the fashion of the day, but with little effect. Her death was thought to be imminent, and it was remarked that the blow seemed as heavy as the death of Lanskoi seven years earlier. Her recovery was quicker, but the permanent effect of her loss was greater. It was not to be expected that at her age she should be able to do without the support on which she had relied so long. "Now, indeed, I must be *Madame la Ressource*," she wrote to Grimm, recalling the name which Peter had given her when she was but Grand Duchess; "again I must educate people for my needs." She did not recognise that it was too late, nor that the wretched Zubof was not of such stuff that she could make a "pupil" of him.

Two elaborate portraits of Patiomkin have come down to us from the pens of the two most interesting writers who were in the inner circle of Catherine's Court. The Comte de Ségur was on more intimate terms with Patiomkin than any foreign resident, and than most Russians. The Prince de Ligne was with him during the Crimean journey, and served under him against the Turks in 1787, when, to use his own words, after committing various follies in the course of his life, he now was guilty of a stupidity — namely, that of entering the Russian service. Both sketches are rather long—indeed, Ségur remarks on the excessive length of the Prince de Ligne's description, which was contained in a letter to Ségur—but both are worth quotation in part. Ségur says:

"In his person were combined the most opposite defects and gifts of every kind. He was avaricious and ostentatious, despotic and popular, inflexible and kindly, haughty and obliging, politic and confiding, licentious and superstitious, bold and timid, ambitious and indiscreet; lavish of his bounties to his relations, his mistresses, and his favourites, yet often refusing obstinately to pay either his house-

hold or his creditors; always attached to some woman, yet always unfaithful. Nothing could equal the vigour of his mind nor the indolence of his body. No dangers could appal his courage, no difficulties force him to abandon his projects; but the success of an enterprise never failed to leave him disappointed. . . . His singularities, though they frequently put the Empress out of humour, rendered him yet more interesting to her. In his youth he pleased her by the ardour of his passion, by his bravery, and by his masculine beauty; at a more advanced period of his life he continued to charm her by flattering her pride, by calming her apprehensions, by confirming her power, by caressing her dreams of Oriental empire, and by promising the expulsion of the barbarians and the restoration of the Greek Empire."

The Prince de Ligne's sketch is written at the camp at Oczakof in 1788. "I see," he says, "a commander-in-chief, who looks idle and is always busy; who has no other desk than his knees, no other comb than his fingers; who is always lying on his couch, though never sleeping, by night or by day, because his zeal for the Sovereign whom he adores keeps him always restless, and because a cannon-shot, to

which he is not exposed himself, makes him uneasy with the thought that it costs the lives of some of his soldiers; fearful for others, brave for himself; stopping under the hottest fire of a battery to issue his orders; yet rather an Ulysses than an Achilles; nervous at the approach of danger, gay when it surrounds him; dull in the midst of pleasure; unhappy in the excess of fortune, surfeited with everything, easily disgusted, morose, inconstant, a profound philosopher, a sublime politician, or like a child of ten years of age"—and so on; the Prince de Ligne, as Ségur says, seldom knew where to break off when his imagination carried him away. "What, then, is his magic?" asks the Prince in conclusion. "Genius, natural abilities, an excellent memory, much elevation of soul, malice without intent to injure, artifice without craft, a happy mixture of caprices, the art of winning every heart in his good moments, much generosity, graciousness, and justice in his rewards, a refined and correct taste, the talent for guessing when he is ignorant, and a consummate knowledge of mankind."

The two friends agree both in assigning to Patiomkin a vast number of contradictory characteristics and in yet producing an in-

telligible portrait. It would be easy to multiply quotations showing that his other contemporaries were similarly struck by the astounding inconsistencies of his nature. But the argument, perhaps, does not require enforcing when his whole life was one great example. If his career be compared with that of the other favourites since Orlof, he will be found to have started with one advantage, indeed, in that he took part in the revolution which put Catherine on the throne, and failed not to attract her notice in so doing. On the other hand, he was certainly the least well-looking of all the favourites. His German biographer, it is true, can talk of "his regular and strongly-marked features; his noble countenance, in which dignity was mingled with sweetness; his colossal but finely-proportioned figure." Ségur speaks vaguely of "his masculine beauty" in the passage quoted above. But the general evidence is to the effect that he was excessively dark, and not at all handsome; one relative of his even described him as "dreadful and repulsive." He was blind in one eye, thanks to Alexis Orlof, which did not improve his appearance. Catherine speaks once, obviously in jest, of his beauty. It was when he returned

to St Petersburg in 1791. It might be said, she wrote, that victory had absolutely beautified him; he returned from the army as handsome as the day. It is significant that he would not allow his portrait to be painted until Catherine persuaded him to allow one to be made in 1783. This is now in St Petersburg, and might serve for any courtier of the period, so little trace of realism is there in it. Yet Patiomkin, without that beauty which appealed so strongly to Catherine, was actual favourite for two years, after the handsome Orlof, and alone of the favourites became her minister after he had been discarded (with or without his co-operation) from the post of favourite. His difficulties at Court, when he resigned that post to Zavadofsky and still held to his political position, were immense. Hatred and contempt were the lot of "Cyclops," of "the blind beggar." He met that treatment with a superior insolence, and for fifteen years more held the reins of government, growing in strength, and giving the Empress favourites or insisting on their dismissal. Every occupant of the position who followed him was his subordinate. Only Zubof could defy him; and Catherine was senile then, and Patiomkin away from her.

The total result of his administration to Russia was considerable. He spent his country's money, wasted enormous sums, largely on his own luxury and display. But he added the Crimea and the Caucasus to Russia, and freed her from the dangers of Turkish neighbourhood in the south. He also insured a future to the new possessions, and a population. He commenced the Russianisation of the Black Sea, and built the first fleet there. He reorganised the Russian army, which stood far higher in Europe after his supremacy at the War Office than before, and initiated the formation of the Cossacks into regiments. The tendency has been far too much to look on Patiomkin as the pupil and Catherine as the teacher. No doubt this was the position as she conceived it, and she could write to Grimm just after his death of "my pupil, my friend, my all but idol—Prince Patiomkin of the Taurida." Ségur, too, calls him "a creature" of Catherine, who had "foretold his greatness, clung to her prediction, and would effect the accomplishment of it, right or wrong." But there is little to prove that Catherine was master rather than Patiomkin. She may, indeed, have dreamt of a Christian empire established at Constantinople, but

Patiomkin presented to her eyes the fact of the Crimea wrested from Turkey, with the sign: "This is the road to Byzantium," facing her at Kherson. It is possible that she had to encourage him when in a fit of despair over the second war with Turkey; but it is certain that her secretary wrote to him in 1788, urging him to return to St Petersburg, as the Empress was dejected, subject to constant terrors, and vacillating from need of support. Terror, too, is said to have been one of her feelings when she heard of Patiomkin's death.

In those later years, when she yet leaned on him so anxiously for support, she did not love him, and had not done so, in the way she loved her favourites, for twelve years and more. Their mutual regard at all times is difficult to measure. Masson seems right in saying that Patiomkin was really and romantically smitten at the beginning, but wrong in saying that he was the first who dared to make advances to her; Gregory Orlof did that also. The early ardour of his affection may have cooled in 1776, as is represented by some, sufficiently to allow him to wish to leave the favourite's rooms at the Palace, while retaining the admiration and trust of the Empress's mind. If not, and if

Catherine was the first to tire, Patiomkin is the more remarkable in that his political power hardly suffered a day's eclipse. The two characters must, indeed, have been made for each other, as their contemporaries declared, for their romance did not really begin until their love had ended. Catherine retained the lovers' terms in addressing Patiomkin long after they had ceased to be lovers; as to whether Patiomkin did the same we have no evidence. Perhaps it may be said that Catherine and Patiomkin always remained lovers with the head to the day of his death. Patiomkin was wise. The love of Catherine's heart was a possession of doubtful value; that of her head was the warrant of success.

Patiomkin, as could but be the case, had a profound belief in himself and in his fortune. "Am I not a spoilt child of God?" he asked the Comte de Ségur once after hearing of a Russian victory. His confidence stood him in good stead twice notably when his position with Catherine was concerned. The one occasion was when he unexpectedly appeared at her card-table the night after Zavadofsky had taken his place; the other when he gave Catherine the choice between himself and the

"white negro," Yermolof. It is true that he failed to force her to marry him by his threat of a monastery. But the menace then was unconvincing. What folly would be the silence of a cell for one whose name resounded through Europe and Asia, she exclaimed when he renewed the threat later.

In his belief in himself we may look for the secret of his conduct towards others. One critic said of him that his fixed aim was to humiliate every man and make love to every woman. His insolence was calculated to humiliate, indeed. Ségur's description of his conduct at Kief is a good example. He delighted in treating as valets the greatest of his countrymen—he was not so discourteous to foreigners—partly through jealousy in some cases, no doubt, as in those of Marshal Rumianzof and Count Stackelberg, the Governor of Russian Poland. The Grand Duke was to him *le petit Paul.* But to women he was quite different. Even the Princess Dashkof could say that from Prince Patiomkin she never failed to experience great kindness and consideration. Probably he did not go so far as to make love to her; but few others were spared by him—neither the wives of his generals, nor his own relatives, the

Engelhardts. He was quite willing that Catherine should know all about his affairs; they confided, in fact, in turn. Patiomkin's pose was distinctly sultanic. There is Langeron's description of him seated, in the midst of the glitter of gold and silver, on a pink and silver divan decorated with flowers and ribbons, dressed in an elegant *négligé*, and at his side the Princess Catherine Dolgoruky, his principal favourite; while about them were five or six most beautiful women, before whom were burning golden dishes containing perfumes. Tooke speaks of him, too, sitting in the midst of twenty ladies, like a sultan in a seraglio, speaking to none of them save in monosyllables and at long intervals: "he wanted nothing but the Turkish pipe for being absolutely the figure we see in pictures of the Grand Signior."

His temper varied between sullenness, which Catherine had to endure like others, high spirits, and violent rage, and he changed rapidly from one state to another. There is a story of him talking to his nephew gaily of his good fortune, how he had all he wanted, and was overwhelmed with favours. Then suddenly he seized up a porcelain plate, dashed it down, and smashed it, and rushed off to lock himself in his bedroom.

Of his violence the most notable example, perhaps, is his treatment of Prince Volkonsky. Patiomkin uttered some witticism, at which Volkonsky clapped his hands. Patiomkin suddenly seized him by the collar, and struck him several blows, saying: "What! You applaud me as if I were a buffoon?" Then he turned to an Austrian general, who was present, and said: "There, General, that is the way to treat this sort of scoundrel." Prince Volkonsky had his revenge, it was said; he did not go to call on Patiomkin for a whole week.

The Comte de Ségur prophesied that posterity would not bestow on Patiomkin the title of a great man but would call him an extraordinary person. Perhaps he deserves the title of great man as much as many to whom it has been awarded. He was "colossal, like Russia," admits Ségur. There was much of what is still considered Russian in his diplomacy, as when in 1785 he assured the French Government that all who knew him would be aware that he cherished no such chimerical ideas as the destruction of Turkey and the establishment of Paul's younger son, Constantine, on a Byzantine throne. Such ideas had, undoubtedly, been his and Catherine's for years. The vastness of the

scheme appealed to him, as did the thought of conquering China. It is averred that preparations were actually made by him to seize control of the Amur River at Nertshinsk; but the lack of timber stopped him. Patiomkin was firmly of opinion that ten thousand Russians could march through China. If we were to judge only by the magnitude and long-sightedness of his ideas we should have to admit Patiomkin a great man without qualification. But his defects were, in their turn, too great; yet without them he might never have ruled Catherine or Russia. He was made by chance, Ségur declares, precisely such as he ought to be for preserving his power over so extraordinary a woman.

It is strange, but it was no doubt due to the ungenerous influence of Zubof, that it was in a mausoleum built by the Princess Branitsky, not by Catherine, that the remains of Patiomkin were placed. This was in the church of Kherson. Paul, on his accession, broke open the tomb, and scattered the ashes, so that no grave now marks the last resting-place of Patiomkin.[1] The little Paul was avenged.

[1] Tooke gives the following list of Prince Patiomkin's titles:—"Knight of the principal orders of Prussia, Sweden,

Poland, and of all the Russian orders; field-marshal, commander-in-chief of all the armies of Russia; chief general of the cavalry; grand admiral of the fleets of Euxine, the Sea of Azof, and the Caspian; senator and president of the college of war; governor-general of Ekatarinoslaf and Taurida; adjutant-general and actual chamberlain to the Empress; inspector-general of the armies; colonel of the Probajensky Guards; chief of the corps of Horse Guards; colonel of the cuirassiers of his name, of the St Petersburg Dragoons, and of the Ekatarinoslaf Grenadiers; chief of all the manufactories of arms and the foundries of cannon; grand hetman of the Cossacks, etc."

THE LAST YEARS

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAST YEARS

It was not thought by those who surrounded Catherine that, when she put the young Guardsman Zubof in the place from which the unfaithful Mamonof had retired, she had settled down to an affection which would endure for the rest of her life. Plato Zubof was generally looked on as a mere child. Indeed, the word "child" was applied to him by most of those who wrote of him at the beginning of his term as favourite. Catherine herself regarded him as such, but claimed credit for her foresight in training up such young men for the service of Russia. She so defended herself against the criticisms of Nicholas Saltikof when he remonstrated with her about Lanskoi and Zubof, both of them but twenty-two years old when brought to the Palace. She made earnest endeavours to establish the truth of her judgment of Zubof's character, taking pains with his education, and interesting him as much as she could in the

affairs of State. Unfortunately for his country, he was no more competent than most of his immediate predecessors, while his disposition was far more mischievous. At first the favourite, who was of graceful figure, dark, of slight build and medium height, seemed to display considerable amiability, and inspired no fears except in the mind of Patiomkin. But, as honours were heaped on him by the lavish hand of Catherine, his real nature came out. He showed himself greedy for all he could get. Money and offices alike he sought both for himself and for his relatives. His pride, too, became intolerable. Masson, whose observations on the end of Catherine's reign we may accept with somewhat modified suspicion, and who saw Zubof also under the rule of Paul, remarks that there was nothing to equal the haughtiness of Zubof except the servility of those who strove to prostrate themselves before him; and it must be acknowledged, he adds, that the abasement of the Russian courtiers always surpassed the insolence of Catherine's favourites. The highest in the land thronged Zubof's ante-chamber, which was more crowded than Catherine's own; while within, in his own room, would lie the favourite, stretched on a

sofa, talking to a fool kept for his amusement, or playing with a pet monkey, which had a great liking for bald foreheads, and would spring at the scanty locks of outraged but unprotesting old courtiers and generals. Of the Grand Duke Paul, Zubof was particularly disdainful. Once, when Paul ventured to express his approval of one of Zubof's ideas, the favourite, almost in the words of Phocion when applauded by an Athenian audience, turned in astonishment and remarked: "Have I said anything wrong?" The Grand Duke was, however, an easy butt in Catherine's Court.

Zubof's defiance of Patiomkin was more remarkable; and, had Catherine been less old and Patiomkin less absent from St Petersburg, could hardly have had any result but the younger man's fall. Zubof had the insight to recognise that Patiomkin was a fatal obstacle to his own supremacy. He was not content to take the love while Patiomkin had the power and the larger share of the money. This might suffice for a Lanskoi, but it could not satisfy a Zubof. He, therefore, intrigued incessantly against Patiomkin, and defeated the latter's attempts to bring about his dismissal. He was firmly established when Patiomkin paid his last visit to St Petersburg.

Death intervened to give a complete victory to Zubof, who was able thenceforth to pursue without interruption his plans for making himself all that either Orlof or Patiomkin had been. His sheer incompetence in affairs did not hinder him from interfering in all departments of State. General Suvarof, father-in-law of his brother Nicholas, could only admit of him that he was "a good under-officer in the Guards." The story was a commonplace at the time, that Plato Zubof's direction to anyone who consulted him on the conduct of business was: "Do as you have been accustomed to do." The result, as may be imagined, was that the offices for whose reform Catherine won credit in her earlier days speedily reverted to their old condition of disorder and corruption. The favourite and his friends were the Government.[1] Zubof's chief assistant, and, indeed, his political guide, was one Markof, who from being a peasant's son had become first secretary to Prince Galitzin, then Russian Minister at The Hague,

[1] Writing of favouritism, with particular reference to this period, Masson says that "whoever directly or indirectly enjoyed the protection of a favourite exercised the most undisguised tyranny, insulted his superiors, trampled on his inferiors, and outraged justice, order, and the ukases with impunity."

and finally reached the department of Foreign Affairs.

There was not wanting, of course, a party of opposition to the Zubof influence. Bezborodko, the Voronzofs, and Count Osterman were its leaders, and they attempted to make use of the Grand Duke's name. But Paul was unwilling to be a figurehead, and Bezborodko, the ablest of the lot, who had added to his fame by concluding the peace with Turkey in 1792, was shut out by his foes. Catherine no longer used her former wise restraint, which had kept the peace between Orlof and Panin, Patiomkin and Panin, and even Patiomkin and Orlof. She had not seldom been infatuated before, but not until her last years did she allow infatuation for one to cause her to be unjust to the merits of others. Even Ségur finds it impossible to defend her to whom he is so loyal against the censures which she called down on herself by her conduct now. He can only write: "One would fain pass over in silence these continued proofs of weakness, prolonged even to a period when age left no excuse for them; but such is the fate of sovereigns, that they have no private life. Their friendships and their sentiments too frequently exercise an influence over politics to escape

public attention. It would not be too much to say that each day of their existence is a page in their history."

Still less creditable to Catherine or to the Zubofs was the fact of her affection for Plato's younger brother, Valerian. It seems impossible to refute the statement of contemporaries that Valerian, who had distinguished himself in Poland in 1792, and was permanently lamed in an outpost affair, for a time shared the honours of favouritism with Plato. Both brothers were large participators in the spoils of Poland after its third and final partition, and in the last year of her reign Catherine appointed the younger general in the war against Persia. Nicholas and a fourth brother, Alexander, benefited by the elevation of the family, and a sister was a person of some influence at Court. Catherine's various favourites and their families made a considerable addition to the aristocracy of Russia, but in many cases (as in that of Plato Zubof, for instance, who died childless at fifty-one, after being married for one year) the addition was not permanent.

The effect of the Zubof ascendancy on Russia's external policy was not so marked or

so disastrous as the effect on domestic affairs. The negotiations with Turkey, which Patiomkin had left unfinished, were carried through by Bezborodko in 1792. In the same year Russia accepted the invitation of the malcontent nobles to interfere in Poland and upset a new Constitution which had been drawn up by the Diet and agreed to by Catherine's old lover Stanislas. The immediate result was the second partition of Poland, Russia taking Lithuania, Podolia, and Volhynia. But worse was still to come for Poland, for a revolt of what patriots there were in the country, under the celebrated Kosciusko, led to the final extinction of the nation, Russia taking over more territory, including the semi-independent Courland. Catherine gave the praise for these territorial gains to the Zubofs, but they had only stepped in to reap what others had sown. Catherine's desertion of the French alliance was to be expected after the French Revolution had alienated her feelings. That she actually agreed to join the coalition against France is attributed to the Zubof influence. Zubof's married sister was on the best of terms with the English Minister at St Petersburg, according to Tooke. The Empress, however, was deeply

moved, without any impulsion from others. She had banished from her room the bust of Voltaire, her idol for so long. She had cast off Diderot. Ségur lost her esteem for acquiescing in the overthrow of Louis XVI. Her detestation of what had occurred made her a remarkable reactionary after the progressive sympathies which she had manifested at the beginning of her reign.

In her devotion to Zubof—Platonic love her courtiers called it, in allusion to the favourite's name—and her concern at the threat against the power of kings Catherine did not forget the interests of her grandchildren. From her conduct to the unfortunate Paul a total lack of maternal feeling might be argued in her. Yet towards his children she showed great tenderness—and not only in her old age. The little Alexander was not much over two years old when his grandmother instituted the practice of having him brought to her at half-past ten every day to spend his morning in her rooms. She taught him his alphabet, invented clothes for him, wrote to her correspondents about his sayings and doings like the fondest of mothers, and composed for him and Constantine a whole series of stories from Russian history. For

Constantine at first she manifested less affection, being, apparently, annoyed at his early delicacy; but as his health improved, and the Greek project became clearer in her mind, she grew devoted to him also. He had originally been christened by the name which he bore with a view to the possibility of his reigning one day as the head of a re-established Christian empire at Constantinople; his nurses were Greeks, and he was dressed in the Greek style of the period. She constantly wrote to both of the children when she was absent from St Petersburg, and was greatly disappointed not to be able to take them with her on the Crimean journey. She behaved to them as if they were her own sons, and alienated them gradually from their actual parents. Her granddaughters, too, she treated with constant affection, and similarly supplanted, as far as possible, Paul and his wife in their hearts. As the children became of marriageable age she set herself to secure suitable alliances for them, ignoring any wishes of the Grand Duke and Duchess. She managed to see both the boys married; her failure to do the same for Alexandra is supposed to have hastened her end.

It was in the year before her death that

Alexander's marriage with Louisa, the elder of the two Baden-Durlach orphans, was carried out. Catherine was very pleased, and showed great fondness for the young bride, in whom she discovered a strong likeness to herself when she arrived in Russia. Her affection for Alexander and his wife is suspected to have gone so far that she contemplated their succession to her in place of the despised Paul. But, like the Empress Elizabeth before her, she died without being able to express her wishes. Constantine, who did not, as she had hoped, approve of the younger Princess of Baden-Durlach (a child of thirteen only in 1795), was married in 1796 to the youngest of the three Saxe-Coburg princesses, brought, like so many others, from the archipelago of princes, as Patiomkin had scornfully termed Germany. Later in the same year Gustavus IV., the seventeen-year-old King of Sweden, came to St Petersburg to meet the young Grand Duchess Alexandra, who was fourteen. This union was ardently desired by Catherine (chiefly, no doubt, from political reasons, since Sweden had been shaking off the Russian influence), and she almost went to war because Gustavus's uncle and guardian had wished to espouse him to a Mecklenburg

princess. The Swedish visit was the occasion of great festivities at the Court, and Catherine was so charmed with Gustavus that she declared herself to be "almost in love with him herself." When he would have kissed her hand, she would not allow him, saying that she could not forget that the Count of Haga (this was his incognito) was a king. Gustavus's reply was that, if she could not give him permission as an Empress, she must at least do so as a lady for whom he had so much respect and admiration. The first meeting of Gustavus and Alexandra was equally propitious, and all seemed well for the desired marriage.

Unhappily, when the day of betrothal, the 21st of September, arrived, Gustavus was asked to sign articles allowing his wife a private chapel and her own priests. The whole Court was assembled, Catherine being supported by Paul and his Grand Duchess, by the young Alexandra dressed in bridal robes, and by the foreign representatives and the nobility of Russia. Gustavus was to appear at seven in the evening. At six he was given the contract. As soon as he saw the articles he refused to sign. In vain Zubof and others urged him to yield. The favourite went backward and forward from

Catherine to him. Finally, Gustavus fled to his room, and locked himself in. Ten o'clock arrived, and Catherine had to be told. She rose from her seat, attempted to speak, but could not find words. She seems to have had a slight fit. She retired to the Tauric Palace, which she had bought after Patiomkin's death, and shut herself up nearly alone. Gustavus and she had several interviews before he left Russia, but he would offer no more than to submit the question of his Queen's faith to the Swedish Diet on his coming of age. After a stay of six weeks he returned to Sweden, without any agreement as to the future.

Catherine kept a strong control over herself to prevent her chagrin and humiliation becoming public, but she could not conceal her feelings entirely. Her touch of apoplexy had been ominous; Masson remarks that the redness of her complexion was much accentuated now. The end came only six weeks later, and came suddenly. On the evening of the 4th of November (according to Masson, who is our authority for the account which follows; the date is Russian style) Catherine was in unusually high spirits, having that day received news by sea from Lübeck of the retreat across

the Rhine of the French under Moreau. She showed great amusement at the foolery of the Grand Equerry, Narishkin, who, as usual, had his pockets as full of trinkets as a cheap pedlar, and drove bargains with her for them. She joked with him on the terror which he always had of death and, to touch him more, told him of the decease of the King of Sardinia, which she had just heard. Finally, she went off to bed rather earlier than was her wont, saying, frankly, that too much laughter had brought on slight symptoms of colic. She rose as early as usual on the morning of the 5th of November, apparently in good humour, took her coffee, saw the favourite and her secretary, and then retired to her room again. After about half-an-hour, either her waiting-women or her valet, not hearing a sound, and growing anxious, went to see, and found the Empress lying stretched on the floor, with her feet against the door. Messengers were sent at once to Zubof and to Dr Rogerson, who on his arrival bled her twice. The Grand Duke Paul was also sent for; but he was at Gatshina, and was unable to arrive until eight in the evening. Catherine was still unconscious then, nor did she utter a word before her death, which took place at ten on the following night,

after thirty-seven hours' unconsciousness. According to some accounts she uttered one final cry as she died; but Tooke seems right when he says that her good genius preserved her from the pains of a lingering illness, and she died fortunately, as she had lived. "His Sacred Majesty Chance" favoured her for the last time.

Happily for Paul, remarks Masson, Catherine's power of speech was gone for ever. He refers, of course, to the suggestion that she intended to disinherit Paul in favour of his son Alexander. It is a curious thing that both this Masson, who was attached to Alexander's suite by Catherine, and his brother were exiled from Russia at the very beginning of Paul's reign, nominally as being of Jacobin sympathies, but probably, according to writers of the period, because they were supposed to be concerned in a scheme to set Alexander on the throne. There is, indeed, a tale of Paul finding in Catherine's desk a will and a manifesto setting himself aside, which he promptly burnt. Those who had entertained the gravest fears of Paul's vengeance on his accession, however, for the most part found those fears groundless. Even the favourite and his creatures, who had habitually insulted the Grand Duke, were treated without bitter-

ness. Plato Zubof had fled to his married sister's home after Catherine's death, expecting total ruin. Yet Paul presented him with a house wherein to live, and insisted on coming, with the new Empress, to take tea with him. It is true that early next year he deprived Zubof of his offices and estates and ordered him to travel, but he took no further steps against him. Alexis Orlof and others connected with the 1762 Revolution were similarly leniently dealt with, with the exception that Orlof and Baratinsky, at the funeral of Peter's exhumed body, were submitted to the ordeal of which we have already spoken.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the regret for Catherine was very general. This was true in spite of the fact that the Catherine of the last few years of her reign was considerably changed for the worse from the Empress who, with all her indifference to morals, had done so much to raise Russia, and the reputation of the Russian Court, in European esteem. Her people had the memory of a reign of thirty-four years, which, though not free from war, was marked by a great advance in peace and prosperity on previous reigns, and by no worse upheaval than the revolt of Pugatshef, which

was not a general movement. The Court of St Petersburg, and particularly that inner circle to which she admitted what was best in her Court, had lost one who presided over it with justice, amiability, and wit. Her grandchildren's affection for her has already been mentioned. That of the Palace servants was almost as personal and as strong. Even Plato Zubof's grief is admitted to have been sincere. He lamented Catherine like a mother, says Masson, and it is only now that he appears interesting.[1] Alone of those connected with her, the Emperor Paul, her son and successor, can have felt little regret at her decease. This Prince was forty-two years of age when he came to the throne, and all those years had been spent in galling dependence on his mother. He was accorded neither the privileges of a son nor, after his marriage, the rights of a father with regard to his own children. Neglected, ignored, and humiliated, he lived a life almost apart. M. Rambaud sees in him a touch of Hamlet. But he had little of the spirit of the Prince of

[1] The same writer describes his disappearance as like that of "the ephemeron, produced by the sun, fluttering in its beams, but not surviving the breeze." Zubof, it must be confessed, had proved a pernicious ephemeron in his day.

Denmark. His acquiescence in his treatment is as mysterious as his actions after ascending the throne. He had many resemblances to his father, none that can be traced to his mother; yet his paternity had been questioned. For his mother's dislike of him we must fall back on the explanation that it was because she knew him to be Peter's son. The memory of what she, as well as Peter, had suffered under the Empress Elizabeth might have been expected to soften her a little, and to make her loth to apply similar treatment to Paul. But this thought never appeared to weigh with her at all. Undoubtedly this conduct towards her son is the greatest blot on her domestic character, otherwise marked by no defect of affection. There is no need, however, to accept Wraxall's statement that, "during the first ten or fifteen years of the reign of Catherine, it was commonly believed that the Grand Duke Paul would sooner or later disappear as Peter the Third did in 1762 and as the unfortunate Emperor Ivan did in 1764." Wraxall himself considered the belief unwarranted; his story of its existence appears to us unwarranted also, for there is no corroboration to be found.

CATHERINE THE GREAT

STATUE TO CATHERINE

In front of the St. Petersburg Theatre.

CHAPTER IX

CATHERINE THE GREAT

As no attempt is made in this book to give a complete account of Catherine's life and reign, it would be inappropriate to conclude with an elaborate study of her character in its general aspects; and such a study is all the more unnecessary in that, within the last dozen years, M. Waliszewski has treated the subject so exhaustively in his two works on this Empress. But we may, perhaps, look briefly here at the claims of Catherine to her title of "The Great" and at her principal characteristics, as illustrated particularly in the relations in which we have been considering her—that is, in her relations with the men with whom she associated herself most closely.

In the first place, it must be recognised by all who have devoted any attention to her life that Catherine was a woman of immense personal charm—a charm, not dependent on her appearance, which she could exercise even over those who seldom or never saw her. She could

exercise it powerfully in her correspondence with men of genius or great talent—such as Voltaire, Diderot, Zimmermann, or Grimm. Stronger still was this power over those with whom she came into actual contact—not her lovers only, nor necessarily men. Examples repeatedly mentioned in this book of those who fell at once and always remained under this influence are the Comte de Ségur, the Prince de Ligne, and the Princess Dashkof. The Austrian Prince says, in one of his letters describing the Crimean journey, that it was the confiding and fascinating simplicity of Catherine which captivated him, and her genius which made him follow her. The Princess Dashkof, whom, perhaps, Catherine treated none too well, was described by Mrs Bradford as still actuated, at sixty, by almost unbounded love and admiration for the Empress. Ségur's estimate of Catherine, though high, is discriminating, and it is worth while to quote it more fully. "Catherine's genius," he writes "was vast, and her mind acute. One saw in her a surprising mixture of qualities which are rarely united. Too fond of pleasure, and yet assiduous in business, she was unaffected in private life, dissimulating in politics; her ambition knew

no bounds, but she directed it with prudence. Constant not in her passions but in her friendships, she had adopted fixed principles in her policy and administration; never did she abandon a friend or a project. Dignified in public, kind and even familiar in society, her gravity was mixed with cheerfulness, her gaiety with decorum. With an elevated mind she only displayed a moderate amount of imagination. Even her conversation seemed by no means brilliant, except in the rare case of her indulging in the discussion of politics or history: her character would then give dignity to her words. She was, in fact, striking as a sovereign and amiable as a private individual."

We may endorse what M. Jauffert says in his "Catherine et Son Règne," that all who approached her were carried away by the charms of her wit and the grace of her manners; but the attachment which she inspired in those whom she honoured with her confidence or her friendship partook of the nature of a cult. The simplicity which was hers was carried throughout her daily life. After she came to the throne she made no changes. She still rose at six in the morning, lit her own fire, and set to work with her secretaries. Her table was

plain, and she observed the strictest sobriety. Such simplicity, which is noted by all, went naturally with the amiability which was also the subject of general remark, and with that accessibility which so struck, for instance, Casanova. It was such qualities which kept her servants so devoted to her. In the "Table Talk of Samuel Rogers" there is an anecdote told by Lord St Helens, whom, under the name of Alleyne Fitzherbert, we have seen as English Minister at the Court of Catherine. Catherine frequently gave small whist parties, he says, at which she sometimes played herself and sometimes not. One night, when she was not playing, but was walking about from table to table, watching the different hands, she wished to summon the page-in-waiting from the ante-chamber, and rang the bell. No one appeared; and after she had rung twice again without effect she left the room, looking daggers, and did not reappear for a considerable time. The company supposed that the unfortunate page was destined to Siberia or at least the knout. As a matter of fact, Catherine on entering the ante-chamber found the page, like his betters, busy at whist. When the bell rang he happened to have so interesting a hand that

he could not make up his mind to quit it. Now, what did the Empress do? She despatched the page on her errand, and then quietly sat down to hold his cards until he should return.

This same simplicity of character, no doubt, accounts also for the curiously undignified sense of humour which Catherine possessed, which attracted her to the buffoon Narishkin, and made her indulge in cat-concerts like that described by the Princess Dashkof, and see such cause for merriment in Poniatowsky's yellow wig or in the boudoir fitted up in her bedroom at the end of 1758. The extent to which she tolerated Narishkin's horse-play is, perhaps, the most surprising example. It is true that she did on one occasion remonstrate to some effect. It was in the year 1758, and Narishkin, after being temporarily alienated from her by the Shuvalof influence, had just been reconciled. Catherine entered her room one day, and found him "impertinently lying on a sofa, and singing a nonsensical song." She went out, closed the door, and fetched his sister-in-law, Anna Narishkin. The two ladies then armed themselves with bunches of nettles, and chastised him soundly on his arms, legs,

and face, with the result that he was laid up for two or three days. All passed off as a jest, Catherine says, and without anger, though the lesson did Narishkin good. But Narishkin remained practical joker to her Court to the end of her days; indeed, on the night before the fit which carried her off, his antics, as has been said, caused her to laugh so excessively that she confessed to feeling ill after it. In her last few years Masson describes all sorts of frolics as being played in Catherine's "little society" —the inner circle, that is, of her friends. "Old, gouty courtiers were seen making whimsical attempts to caper. One day the Grand Duke Constantine actually broke the arm of the now feeble Count Stackelberg by jostling him roughly and knocking him over." The manners of the little society did not improve as Catherine grew older, it is clear.

With such a development of her humour it is not surprising, in spite of Catherine's reputation for wit, to find even the Prince de Ligne writing: "Her perceptions are not quick. One must never be too subtle in jest, for she is liable to suppose the reverse of what is meant. What one says must be as simple as she is." Yet she took correction well, as from the Prince

himself, when talking on the Crimean journey of what she would have been were she a man and a private person. "I know my fiery character," she said. "I should have risked all in the pursuit of glory, and should have got my brains blown out as a sub-lieutenant on my first campaign." "I think not, Madame," retorted the Prince, "for I still live." Catherine took some time to think, he says, and then laughed softly to herself. She recognised that she had no monopoly of courage; nor was she offended that this should be pointed out.

She was, indeed, neither quick to take offence nor malicious. "Far from revenging herself even for a real offence," says the Prince de Ligne again, "she merely withdraws her familiarity, and it is difficult to obtain it anew." She could not have given clearer instances of the truth of this than in her treatment of Korsakof and Mamonof; while a striking proof of her lack of malice may be seen in her attitude towards Elizabeth Voronzof, whom she only sent away from St Petersburg, and whose daughter, after Elizabeth had married Admiral Paliansky, she accepted as a maid-of-honour in 1785. This absence of resentment runs throughout her character. Even when a French paper

went so far as to insult her with the title of "the Messalina of the North" she merely ignored it, though she was extremely bitter towards the French over their conduct towards their own sovereign.

But, of course, these amiable characteristics of Catherine would not in themselves have inspired great men with the idea of her greatness. Napoleon would not have declared such a Catherine worthy of a beard;[1] nor would Diderot have seen in her "the candlestick bearing the light of the age." She was clever as well as charming. She was well read, particularly for a monarch, and she had an assimilative mind. It may be said that her "Instructions" were plagarisms rather than adaptations; but she really won for herself very early in her reign the reputation of being liberal-minded and an admirer of the philosophers. We may be obliged to admit that she wrote, in a way, for the gallery, as M. Rambaud says in his Introduction to M. de Larivière's "Catherine II. et la Révolution Française"; but it must be remembered that she told Grimm that her *pancartes* must not be published for

[1] According to him she was *une maîtresse femme, digne d'avoir de la barbe au menton.*

a hundred years after her death. We may have to allow also that Ségur was correct when he said that Catherine and Frederick the Great both loved to be intoxicated with the incense of celebrity, and to obtain it were lavish of themselves to Voltaire, Rousseau, Raynal, D'Alembert, and Diderot. But both of them had the wherewithal to be lavish.

Catherine was undoubtedly clever as well as charming. But were these two qualities enough to win her the title of "The Great," bestowed on her by Voltaire, and freely used during her lifetime? She probably would have been content to admit that a third factor contributed to gain the name for her—namely, her luck. She was lucky in her ministers Panin and Patiomkin, especially the latter. It has been said already that these two men have been generally underrated. Of Patiomkin, Ségur points out that the admiration which his conquests excited was for Catherine, the hatred which they raised for her minister; and he thought that posterity, more equitable, would, perhaps, divide between Catherine and Patiomkin the glory of the successes and the severity of the reproaches. But posterity has been very slow to do as Ségur suggested, and the minister has hardly yet had his due.

This is the more remarkable, since men of talent were not prominent at Catherine's Court. Masson, in a comparison between Catherine and Louis XIV., says that while it was the French nation that made the glory of Louis it was Catherine who made that of the Russians; not, he adds, that Russia lacked men of merit, but Catherine feared them.[1] Hence it follows, in his opinion, that all Catherine's measures were her own. The argument is somewhat shallow, and the conclusion not entirely true. We must not forget Catherine's remarks to Grimm about her liking to be carried along by those more disposed to action than herself, if only they concealed their purpose, and about the leading of Orlof.

What, then, are we to make of Catherine's continual insistence on her "education" of her favourites and on the theory that they are her "pupils"; and, above all, that Patiomkin is her pupil? Her view was widely accepted by her contemporaries, and by subsequent writers. Ségur designates Patiomkin as her creature, as we have already said. M. Waliszewski accepts

[1] Masson complains that, if we except the Saltikofs, no family of distinction was taken into Catherine's favour. Almost everyone in office or with credit at Court was the favourite of fortune. There is a good deal in this reproach.

Patiomkin, with all his genius, as Catherine's pupil, even if the best and most original. Perhaps we may quote on the other side M. Waliszewski's own statement, when contrasting the female favouritism of Louis XV. with the favouritism of Catherine, that Louis simply endured the influence of his mistresses and their intervention in affairs, while Catherine encouraged and demanded such conduct from those whom she favoured. It is not from a mere pupil that such intervention would be asked. We may agree that, for the most part, Catherine's favourites were her pupils—and very bad pupils, too. With regard to Patiomkin, however, it must not be forgotten that he ruled nineteen years out of Catherine's thirty-four, and that the five years which followed his death were the least glorious of her reign. But Catherine herself was never ungenerous to her associates. It pleased her vanity that she should appear the inspirer; yet, in the words of the Prince de Ligne, she was not afraid of seeming to be governed. The Prince is enthusiastic over her modesty about her achievements. "She justifies her magnificence on the ground that by giving money she obtains a large return. She justifies the great number of offices she has created in the

provinces by declaring that in this way specie is circulated, fortunes are increased, and the nobles are made to stay on their estates instead of flocking to Moscow or St Petersburg. If she has built in stone two hundred and thirty-seven towns it is, she says, because villages built of wood are always burning, and costing her a great deal of money. If she has created a splendid fleet in the Black Sea it is because Peter the Great loved the navy. She has always some such modest excuse for her great actions."

We are reminded of the humble judgment Catherine passed upon herself near the end of her life: "I have guided my little ship to the best of my ability." Her guidance of that little ship has by no means, of course, escaped some severe criticisms. Her latest historian, M. Waliszewski, says plainly that from the year 1762 down to the date of her death there was but one corrupting influence in her Empire—and that was Catherine herself. She used her influence, he continues, for the good of the Empire, as she conceived it; but morality suffered for it nevertheless, and the influence on the Russian national genius was long and disastrous. The chief charge brought against her government at the time, however, was in-

constancy of plan. There was no general agreement with Ségur's remark that she never abandoned either a friend or a project. On the contrary, she was seen by others deserting her code for the war against Turkey, her rules of provincial government for Crimean expansion, and so on, until Masson says that before her death the monuments of her reign resembled so many ruins. Nevertheless, Ségur seems juster than Masson. Catherine did not abandon her projects any more than her friends. A new project, like a new friend or favourite, might drive the predecessor from the foremost place. But this did not imply that the predecessor was deserted altogether, though it did bring it to pass that there were many schemes left incomplete at the end of Catherine's reign. Had this not been so, what dimensions would not the list of her achievements have attained?

Summing up these achievements in concrete form, M. Jauffert says that while Peter the Great made Russia, in spite of herself and in spite of Europe, an European Power, Catherine made Russia recognised as such; or as Voltaire expresses it: "Peter made the man, Catherine breathed the divine fire into him." Catherine found Russia a nation of twenty-three millions,

with little voice in the affairs of the Continent, and left behind her a nation of nearly forty millions, with a position on the Continent almost of arbiter—her own word, as we shall see. The territorial gains to Russia in Catherine's thirty-four years were considerably more than three times the size of the British Islands. The changes were only brought about by most skilful diplomacy, for which we cannot withhold from Catherine a large share of the credit. The process was long and laborious, but it was crowned by complete success.

When she came to the throne Catherine found Russia lately bound to an unpopular alliance with Prussia, due to the fervid admiration of Peter III. for his "master," Frederick the Great. Though Russia, in combination with Austria, had in Elizabeth's last years humiliated Prussia to the extent of making Frederick ready to purchase peace at the cost of territorial cessions, Peter had carried his esteem for his kinsman so far as not only not to take advantage of the situation but even to throw his weight into the scale against Austria. With Catherine's accession this subordination of Russia to Prussia necessarily ceased. The Russian troops did not actually change sides; in fact, they stood by and watched

while Frederick inflicted defeat on Marshal Daun. The result was the end of the Seven Years' War by the Peace of Hubertsburg. The situation was now open for a rearrangement of alliances in Europe, and Russia's friendship was in the market. Speaking of the state of affairs at this period, old Marshal Münich, who had refused to betray Peter, yet succeeded in retaining Catherine's esteem, compared the Empress's conduct with that of a clever coquette, provoking all but yielding to none. It was necessary, however, to come to a decision. Austria was not at the time a convenient ally, because her interests and those of Russia seemed to clash both in Poland and in Turkey; moreover, the personal feelings of Maria Theresa towards Catherine were not friendly. Nor was France, the supporter of Turkey and of the parties in Sweden and Poland which were hostile to Russia, a likely ally. And between these two Powers, France and Austria, there was a close bond already in existence. Prussia, on the other hand, was isolated, and Frederick, exhausted by his wars, and no longer subsidised by England, promised to be an accommodating partner. Accordingly, in 1774 a defensive alliance with Frederick was made. This seemed

a remarkable outcome of the first two years of a reign which began with a denunciation of Frederick as the worst enemy of Russia. But the hand of Panin was plainly visible, as it was throughout the foreign policy of the earlier half of Catherine's reign. And it must be recognised that the new convention was no repetition of that which Peter III. had made with Prussia, the meaning of which was accurately summed up in Peter's use of the term "our master" for Frederick.

Why should not Catherine have thought of England, it may be asked? Peter the Great, for whose counsels she always declared the utmost reverence, had advised friendship with England, from whom Russia might best learn how to become a naval power. Catherine did, indeed, cultivate good terms with England, with whom a commercial treaty was arranged in 1766 giving English traders most favourable treatment. In return, the Russian navy received great assistance from English officers, as Alexis Orlof found to his own great profit in the war against Turkey. The fleet which he then took round from the Baltic to the Ægean Sea, moreover, was enabled to touch at English ports on the way. England at the time viewed

Russian naval growth without apprehension. It was Catherine's accession to the Armed Neutrality in 1780 which first undeceived English statesmen.

But an alliance with a Continental Power was necessary to strengthen Russia's position, and the advantages of the union with Prussia very soon became obvious. The friendship of England and Denmark, too, was secured therewith, Russia entering into what is sometimes called "the system of the north," which was directed against the combination of France and Austria. The first fruits of the new policy for Russia were that Catherine was able to establish a supremacy over Courland, a Polish dependency, by setting on the vacant throne Biron, the Tsarina Anna's former favourite, and after the death of Augustus of Poland to carry through the election of Stanislas Poniatowsky to the Polish throne. The Czartorisky family had now reaped the benefit of the intrigues of Stanislas at St Petersburg; how fatal this was to prove to Poland they might be pardoned for not seeing. France had supported the Saxon candidature in Poland. This would by no means have suited Frederick, who dreaded the strengthening of either Poland or Saxony,

and Prussia was, therefore, well content to acquiesce in Russian policy.

Thwarted in Poland, France was still able to stir up Turkey, who declared war against Russia after the violation of the frontier by adherents of the Confederacy, opponents of the new King of Poland, flying before the Russian troops. Russia was, however, more than a match for the Turks, who were not only defeated on land and driven finally out of the Crimea, but also annihilated at sea by the fleet which Admiral Orlof had brought from the Baltic. Only the extent of Russia's successes checked her career. Austria could not remain still and watch Russia in occupation of the Danubian provinces as well as of the Crimean region and some of the Ægean islands. Frederick warned his ally that he was not prepared to take part in a war against a Franco-Austrian combination. Negotiations with Turkey began at Fokshani, but, thanks to Gregory Orlof, were abortive. At Kutchuk Kainardji, however, two years later, peace was concluded, with considerable advantage to Russia, as has been stated in a previous chapter. Nor were Azof and Kinburn the only territorial gains by Russia at this period. Frederick had sug-

gested that consolation for what Russia did not wrest from Turkey should be sought from Poland—Austria being admitted with Prussia in a triple partition. Catherine, though the maintenance of an undespoiled Poland under the domination of Russia would have been preferable, yielded to the suggestion; and, taking advantage of the constant anarchy in Poland, the three Powers carried out the iniquitous first partition of the country in 1772. Russia obtained the largest share, but she had to be witness of the conquest of people of Slav race by foreigners.

In two directions Russia had already profited greatly by the alliance with Prussia; and it was suspected that the two Powers were contemplating treating Sweden as they had treated Poland, when the vigorous assertion by Gustavus III. of the privileges of King and people against the oligarchical Diet upset their plans, and saved Sweden. But a change was gradually coming over Russian policy with the growth of Patiomkin's influence and the decline of Panin's. This growth, as we have seen, was slow in affecting foreign affairs. Catherine would not throw over Count Panin to please Patiomkin. But Panin himself declined in mental vigour as he

grew older, and Russia began to draw away from Prussia as his grasp of affairs relaxed. The system of the north was being abandoned in favour of another system of diplomacy. The first notable sign was the joint mediation of France and Russia between the two parties in the War of the Bavarian Succession. The Congress of Teschen in 1779 reconciled Austria and Prussia, but it also was the signal of the coming substitution of Austria for Prussia in Russia's friendship.

There was no open breach with Prussia. With England, on the other hand, Catherine's rupture was complete. The American War was in progress, and her indignation was aroused at the claims of the British Navy with regard to neutral merchantmen. In 1780 Russia gave her adhesion to the Armed Neutrality, the principles defended by which it is of some interest to recall at the present time. The main points were that neutral ships should be allowed to navigate freely the coasts of the belligerents, that non-contraband goods of subjects of the belligerents should be safe in neutral vessels, that "contraband" should include only arms and ammunition (whereas the English Admiralty would apply the term even

to grain), and that only effective blockades should be recognised. Catherine's sentiments towards England changed considerably at this time, and it was for this reason that Fitzherbert later found it impossible to obtain a renewal of the Anglo-Russian commercial treaty. It was only when the French Revolution had aroused her anger that she reconsidered her views about the revolted American colonists also and became more friendly to England again.

The effect of the drawing together of Russia and Austria at once became plain. It involved better relations between Russia and France, which to Catherine, the admirer of Voltaire and of the liberal ideas of his friends, could only be congenial. To Russia the advantage soon appeared. Tired of the constant anarchy in the Crimea and of the pretence of Crimean independence, the Russians in 1783 annexed both the Crimea and the Kuban region, lying to the east. France refused to support the protests of the Porte, which was obliged, therefore, to acquiesce in the accomplished fact. But this did not satisfy Patiomkin or his mistress, whose ideas about the ejection of the Turks from Europe and the establishment of

an Orthodox Christian Empire at Constantinople had now taken definite form. For the success of this plan more than mere friendliness on the part of Austria was required. We have seen how the co-operation of the Emperor Joseph was secured, and how the Turks accepted the inevitable, and commenced a war in which their prospects seemed very poor at the outset. We have also seen how the unexpected intervention of Gustavus III. appeared to threaten Russia with disaster, when all her best troops were away on the Danube, but was met by the courage of Catherine, backed by the internal dissensions of the Swedes. Gustavus agreed to the Peace of Verela in 1790, being anxious to lead a crusade against Revolutionary France. This had Catherine's approval, though not her active assistance. Patiomkin was not to be distracted from his struggle with Turkey. The Turks, deserted by Sweden, were in hard straits. Their successes against the Austrians in 1788 had been followed by severe defeats from the Russians, and from the Russians and Austrians combined. The Danubian principalities were in the Allies' hands; Bender was captured by Patiomkin and Ismail by Suvarof. The death

of Joseph proved a relief to Turkey, for his successor concluded peace; but the Russians continued their successes, the mouth of the Danube falling entirely into their hands. The Turks were quite willing to sue for terms, and after the death of Patiomkin there was no obstacle to the Treaty of Jassy. That Russia obtained no more than Otchakof, the Black Sea coast between the Bug and the Dniester, and certain guarantees with regard to the principalities bordering on the Danube, was partly due to exhaustion from the length and expensive character of the war and partly to fresh troubles in Poland.

The last days of that unhappy nation were approaching. The reformed constitution introduced by the Diet in 1791 gave offence to Catherine, who saw in it an echo of the French Revolution. Troops were sent from Russia to help the party which rebelled against the new constitution. Prussia, now under the rule of Frederick William II., so far from objecting to Russia's action, united with her for the second partition of Poland, which was duly carried out in 1793, Austria having no share in this. Little was left to Stanislas when Russia had taken Lithuania, Volhynia, and Podolia, and

Prussia, Dantzig and Thorn. Nor was that little left to him more than two years longer, though Russia had guaranteed the country's independence. The rising of Kosciusko was but a glorious failure. Freedom may have shrieked when he fell, but the three Powers—Austria being admitted to the partition again—divided the remains of Poland without further protest.

The foregoing brief sketch of Russia's foreign conquests during the reign of Catherine has seemed necessary to illustrate the nature of her policy. It must be admitted that the diplomacy displayed was very skilful. If we look at the gains in territory alone we see that, by the help of the Prussian alliance, Russia secured from Turkey Azof and Kinburn, with the independence of the Crimea and Kuban, from Poland White Russia, and in Courland a kind of suzerainty. Then, with the assistance of Austrian friendship, bringing with it that of France, she proceeded to annex the Crimea and Kuban, to extend her frontier at Turkey's expense to the Dniester, and to take over first three provinces and then the remainder of Russian Poland, together with Courland. Frederick the Great had made it a point in

his policy to play off against each other Austria and Russia; Catherine and her ministers, with greater success, played off Austria and Prussia. Of course, it cannot definitely be said that Catherine started out with the intention of so using the two Powers against one another, even though, with Marshal Münich, we credit her at the beginning of her reign with the "strategy of the clever coquette." It is too much to imagine that Catherine had, at the outset of her imperial career, already formed the idea of squeezing a Prussian alliance dry and then turning to Austria. This would be to make her principal ministers mere tools in her hands, and all the evidence which we can find points to the falseness of such a view.

One would naturally imagine Catherine's strongest sentiments at the time of her accession to have been an admiration for France and a politic, but not personal, dislike of Peter's idol and the Russian bugbear, Frederick of Prussia. A French alliance was not of practical use to Russia, even if possible, at the moment. There were reasons, as has been said, against an Austrian alliance. The Prussian alliance, however, in spite of the unpopularity of Peter's devotion to Frederick, offered Russia what she

required at the moment. It found a convinced supporter in the man whom Catherine had chosen to direct her foreign affairs. It was amply justified in a very short time, and it is to be noted that it now caused no complaints among the Russians, who during the few months of Peter's reign had denounced it vehemently. When Patiomkin arose and captivated Catherine's imagination with his development of schemes, which she already dreamt of, concerning a new Christian empire in the East, the advantages of Prussian friendship had mostly been gained, and as Panin gradually failed the gigantic, romantic, and barbaric Patiomkin[1] found Catherine a willing convert to his ambitious plans. The Austrian alliance came about naturally. It did not involve hostility to Prussia, and towards the end of her reign Catherine was consciously and deliberately playing with both Powers in a way that she did not venture on earlier in her reign. The remark which she made to her Vice-Chancellor, Ostermann, in 1791 is a proof of this. "Am I wrong?" she asked him. "For reasons which I cannot give to the Courts of Berlin and Vienna, I wish

[1] *Il y a du gigantesque, du romanesque et barbaresque dans ce caractère-la.* (The Prince de Ligne on Patiomkin.)

to involve them in these affairs, so that I may have elbow-room. Many of my enterprises are still unfinished, and they must be occupied so as to leave me unfettered." "These affairs" were the affairs of France, against whose Republican Government Catherine wrote and spoke so bitterly, without taking, however, more active steps herself than the excitement of other nations against France. It does not follow that she was insincere in her denunciation of the French Republic; merely she did not think it Russia's duty to interfere actively in the West—that duty, according to her, directed her farther east and south.

Soon after Catherine had ascended the throne she wrote to the Russian representative at Warsaw a letter in which these words occur: "My aim is to be joined in the bonds of friendship with all the Powers in armed alliance, so that I may always be able to range myself on the side of the oppressed, and in this way may become the arbiter of Europe." Catherine is not always found conspicuous on the side of the oppressed; Poland is witness against her, and Count Simon Voronzof's excuse, that she was led away by Prussia first, will not absolve her. But that she attained, to a large extent, the

coveted position of arbiter of Europe cannot be denied. This monument of her reign—a monument which she planned from the beginning—was not left a ruin at least; that it became one afterwards was due to circumstances to which no acts of Catherine conduced.

Though we make all necessary deductions on the ground of the influence of her two leading ministers, the first of whom cultivated the friendship of Prussia and the second that of Austria, and all deductions also for the assistance of "His Sacred Majesty Chance," we can but recognise still abundant justification for the title so freely bestowed in her lifetime of Catherine the Great. In her internal policy, it is true, she failed to carry out the ideas of her early reign to the same extent as in her foreign policy. Her readiness to relegate one scheme to an inferior place, to devote herself to another and a newer, militated against the success of many of her schemes, and caused many to be left incomplete. And the baneful influence of the Zubof ascendency in her old age undid not a little of the reforming work which had been accomplished earlier. Yet her reign of thirty-four years was for Russia happier and comparatively more peaceful than those of her

predecessors, and she left the country not only larger but better inhabited[1] and better governed. Yet it is safe to say that, without the fascination of her personality, the fact that Catherine deserved so well of her country would not have won her the name of The Great.

[1] Both Catherine and Patiomkin were eager for the colonisation of South Russia, and the newly-conquered lands in particular. In this way alone could the dangers of the wild Tartar tribes be stopped. The Volga and the Ukraine were largely peopled by German immigrants, and Patiomkin similarly did all he could to attract foreign settlers to his Tauric government. Of Catherine's two hundred to two hundred and fifty new towns a large proportion of the inhabitants were foreigners.

CATHERINE THE GREAT

CHAPTER X

CATHERINE THE GREAT (*continued*)

With the subject of favouritism in Catherine's reign we have already dealt very briefly earlier in this book. We may consider it now a little more fully. It seems sometimes to be thought almost a sufficient explanation of Catherine's character to quote Pope's lines:

> "In men, we various ruling passions find;
> In women, two almost divide the kind;
> Those, only fixed, they first or last obey,
> The love of pleasure and the love of sway."

Masson makes a remark of very similar import on Catherine, that "she had two passions which only died with her: her love for man, which degenerated into libertinage, and her love of glory, which degenerated into vanity." Some find it hard to make Catherine's behaviour with regard to favourites harmonise with her general character. M. Waliszewski, after stating that her shameless sensuality seems an isolated phenomenon, unconnected with the rest of her temperament, proceeds to say that this is so,

perhaps, only in appearance, and that there may be a connection between this sensuality and the intellectual culture of one who loved to call herself a pupil of Voltaire. He sees a certain lofty cynicism, not to be explained merely on the ground of a physiological anomaly.

There is in Catherine's attitude towards the institution of favouritism a constant intention to treat it as a matter of fact. In her writings she neither particularly defends nor yet blames herself. We have said before that she seems from the beginning to have been non-moral in her point of view on the question. Her judgment, or rather absence of judgment, on herself in her Memoirs, though these were written at a distance from the events which they described, is in strict keeping with her actions therein portrayed. This consistency of mental attitude is not, of course, contradicted by a gradation in conduct. As she advanced in life she certainly grew less restrained. We need not, however, with M. Jauffert seek in Patiomkin the corrupting influence. This writer, after finding in Gregory Orlof a loyal character (!), elevated spirit, and devoted affection, which encouraged in Catherine a certain reserve, makes Patiomkin responsible for her deteriora-

tion by intoxicating her with incense, surrounding her with lies, and, by his perverse genius, malignity, and depravity, steeping her Court in intrigues and coarse pleasures. Patiomkin certainly exercised no moral restraint on Catherine—no more, in fact, than Orlof. But she was her own corrupter, and her conduct grew worse by its own indulgence. She might well have applied to herself that favourite maxim of Casanova: *Nemo lœditur nisi a seipso.*

It must be noted that with Catherine's disregard of the general ideas of propriety in her system of favouritism there went a certain severity on moral questions. No better example of this can be found than in the story told by Ségur of what happened at Baktshi Serai during the Crimean journey. The imperial party had been paying a visit to the seraglio in the palace of the former Khan of the Crimea. "It was natural enough that the sight of those voluptuous cabinets should awaken some ideas of gallantry; the Prince de Ligne's curiosity—he was younger in feeling at fifty than I was at thirty—led me into a folly which, fortunately, was attended with less disagreeable consequences than we might justly have anticipated, but which drew on us a severe and well-merited

rebuke." The Prince de Ligne asked Ségur what pleasure there was in running through a large garden without examining the flowers, and the two agreed to make an attempt to see at least one Tartar lady without her veil. They started on a search, and very soon came across three Tartar women, unveiled, washing their feet in a stream. Stationing themselves behind some trees they examined the unveiled faces. "But, alas! not one of them was either pretty, young, or even passable. 'Egad,' exclaimed the Prince de Ligne inconsiderately, 'Mahomet was right in wishing them to hide themselves.'" The noise startled the women, who fled screaming; whereon a number of Tartar men appeared, and began to stone them. A quick retreat was the only resource. The next night at dinner the gay Prince, finding the conversation dull, thought fit to relate the escapade, Ségur in vain pinching him all the while. When he had finished all laughed except Catherine, who, with a stern and severe countenance, reproved the ill-advised amusement and the bad example, and stated that she wished the laws, religion, manners, and prejudices of a people conquered by her arms to be respected. "If anyone had related this adventure to me without naming

the heroes," she added, "far from suspecting that you were the actors, I should rather have judged some of my pages the guilty persons, and have punished them severely." The culprits remained silent, and Catherine forgave them so far that in a few days' time she allowed them to conceal themselves while she was giving audience to a Mussulman princess. This might lead one to suspect that her indignation was not so strong as it appeared. But it was a well-known fact at her Court that no scandalous or licentious talk, no attacks on morals or religion, could find favour with the Empress. Ségur even annoyed her once by reciting some verses which he confesses to have been a little free, though they had been well received by virtuous and amiable ladies in Paris. He quotes, in this connection, a remark by his brother on the contrast between the indulgence permitted by virtuous women and the apparent severity of those who are not so perfect: "Where virtue reigns a show of nice decorum is useless."

The behaviour of Catherine towards those whom she elevated to the post of favourite has been uniformly described as the most generous possible. The way in which she heaped gifts

on the men of her choice from the moment of their selection was an unfortunate weakness from the point of view of Russia, which had to provide the money. It has already been mentioned that Catherine assigned to her favourites a more regular position than any of her predecessors had given to theirs. In addition to the expense of the fixed salary and the suite of rooms in the Palace, the gifts of money, jewelry, estates, etc., which she lavished on the favourites cost Russia, according to Castèra's estimate, no less than ninety-two million eight hundred and twenty thousand roubles. The principal items were: Patiomkin, fifty million roubles (of which nine millions fell to him in his two years at the Palace); the Orlofs, seventeen millions; Lanskoi, over seven millions; and the Zubofs, three millions and a half. This expenditure of money did not represent all that she did for the favourites. Titles and honours were loaded on them, the most powerful receiving not merely Russian decorations but also those of the Holy Roman Empire, bestowed by the Emperor Joseph at Catherine's request. Orlof, Patiomkin, and Plato Zubof were all thus made princes by Joseph. The two latter are described as being so covered with orders

that they looked like hawkers of trinkets and ribbands at a fair. When she dismissed them, even for offences like those of Korsakof and Mamonof, she did so with fresh gifts, not with any marks of anger. Ségur is impelled by her conduct after Mamonof's infidelity to write: "When Catherine is drawn her weaknesses are the shadows of the picture; but at least they leave the generosity of her character undarkened. Few women invested with absolute power would have shown so much moderation when they saw their sentiments betrayed and their self-love wounded." Masson, considering Catherine's generosity, is moved to remark how far removed is her conduct from "that of an Elizabeth of England, who cut off the heads of her favourites and her rivals." Without accepting this scandal about Queen Elizabeth quite as Masson presents it, we must admit that Catherine's behaviour was far better than that of Elizabeth. Curiously enough, Sainte-Beuve, also contrasting Catherine with Elizabeth and with Christina of Sweden, holds that her practice of heaping gifts on the discarded lover rather than assassinating him really told against her, since it showed openly how great was her scorn of men and nations. Now, a measure of

cynicism with regard to public opinion cannot be denied. But her changes in the post of favourite do not appear to indicate a contempt for the occupiers of the post; her tendency lay all in the opposite direction. In love, as in affairs, however, she was always liable to be diverted from one object to a newer, and the former favourite, like the earlier plan, had to sink to a secondary place. It cannot be pretended that the parallel is exact, but there is an intelligible similarity.

It was only natural that this changeableness, which was yet hardly fickleness, should go with the love of contrasts which has already been remarked as shown in Catherine's choice of favourites—the spirit which attracted her to an Orlof after a Poniatowsky, a Zoritch after a Zavadofsky, a Yermolof after a Lanskoi. What was strange was that, in men of such very different temperaments, tastes, and abilities, she should have tried, with apparent success, to see similar qualities of mind. Allusion has been made to Catherine's enthusiasm with regard to Orlof, Lanskoi, Mamonof, and Zubof. Now, we have suggested that there may, indeed must, have been in Orlof a reserve power which could justify her in drawing for Grimm the picture

of the favourite instinctively leading and herself following. Some such power, too, is necessary to explain the long period of Orlof's supremacy, only outdone by Patiomkin's nineteen years, of which, however, only two were spent as Palace favourite. But it is far more difficult to explain how Catherine could be so blinded by infatuation as to see great mental powers in Lanskoi, Mamonof, Zubof, not to mention any others of the favourites. Lanskoi was found by those who met him amiable, refined, and a virtuoso; Mamonof was well bred and fairly educated; but no one except Catherine discovered any marked talent in either of them. Zubof was an even more striking case of Catherine's lack of judgment. We have seen what he was. Yet, on the testimony of one of her courtiers, Rastopshin, she was constantly telling everyone that Zubof was as great a genius as Russia had seen. Such an estimate of such a man is infinitely worse than seeing in Gregory Orlof "a truly great man," and can best be explained, perhaps, on the ground of the impaired faculties and age of her who made it. But the want of judgment runs throughout her life, and it is only made the more glaring because she lavished on Patiomkin, the one

outstanding personage among the favourites, the same praises as on his feebler rivals. This faulty power of judging and this lack of discrimination in one whose mind is usually so clear seem the penalty which Catherine paid for her want of control over her heart. She looked always at the romantic side of every man—not only of her lovers but also of all who served her, as M. Waliszewski points out —and when her fancy was taken she busied herself to invest the object with the qualities which her brain told her would alone justify her in conferring the honours which she was wont to give. Russia naturally suffered for Catherine's error; that Russia did not suffer more was due to the fact that at least one of the idols was to some extent what Catherine represented him to be.

Catherine had, indeed, cause to regret that her sense of beauty, which led her mind so astray, was not more under her control. She made no secret of her infatuations to either her confidant Grimm, the foreign representatives at St Petersburg, or her own Court. She could write to Grimm about the unworthy Korsakof as "the painters' peril and the sculptors' despair," and describe him as "a

masterpiece of Nature." She caused the foreign ministers to write in wonder to their home Governments and her courtiers to laugh at her follies. Moreover, her conduct gave opportunity for the most offensive libels to circulate about Europe. Catherine did not appear to be affected by such attacks in her lifetime, though it is recorded that she ordered a few of the caricatures to be burnt by the hangman at St Petersburg. Yet she was not one to neglect posterity's verdict, for it was to this that she appealed in much of what she wrote. One might almost think that Catherine trusted in the justice of posterity to weigh her merits against her weaknesses and to decide that the former outbalanced the latter. This is what posterity has done, or such portion of posterity, at least, as has a judgment which it is worth while to gain.

Further than this it hardly seems possible to go into the mysteries of Catherine's heart. Her vice—for it is more just to speak of her "vice" than of her "vices"—cannot be neglected by any historian of Catherine, for it is an integral part of her character, and greatly affected her government. It cannot be said exactly to add to the attraction of her character, in

spite of the curiously extravagant remark of Lord Camelford that "Catherine honoured the throne by her vices"; but that character, under its influence, has a special interest which it certainly would not have without. And this must be the excuse of one who is not a scandalous chronicler for dwelling upon the weakness which left Catherine still great.

About the personal appearance of Catherine a considerable number of descriptions by eye-witnesses have been preserved. There are occasional divergences, but the main outlines are in perfect harmony. In fact, few great personages in history have been so well painted in words. We have already given the enthusiastic portrait by Stanislas Poniatowsky of her looks at twenty-five. We have given, too, her own modest sketch of herself in 1750, five years earlier. D'Eon and Rulhière have also described her in the days when she was still Grand Duchess. The Chevalier is struck by her brilliant and fascinating eyes, "like those of a wild beast" (!), and her high brow, on which, however, he saw a long and awful future written. She was kind and affable, yet when she came near him he drew back with a movement he could not control. She

frightened him. In this he was singular; but he was a singular man. Rulhière is quite enthusiastic about her noble figure, majestic gait, graceful deportment, and royal air. In the union of her head and neck is wonderful beauty. Her brow is large and open, her nose aquiline,[1] her mouth set off by beautiful teeth. Her hair, he says, is chesnut-coloured, and her eyes brown and very fascinating, having a bluish tinge in certain lights; and her complexion is of dazzling whiteness. How Rulhière comes to make her eyes brown it is impossible to say. Others all make them blue, and Masson calls them *gris-clair*; once more Rulhière must be inaccurate. As to the tint of her hair, the terms brown, chestnut, and auburn are all applied to it—generally brown. Yet Casanova says that "the banker Hoffman of Leipsic" told him something about Catherine which many Russians did not know. "They are under the impression that their Empress is a brunette, as they have always seen her with brown, or rather black, hair; the actual fact is that she is blonde, but at the age of ten years they began to comb her hair with leaden

[1] Madame Vigée-Lebrun, the painter, describes her nose as "quite Greek"; so Poniatowsky.

combs and to anoint it with a certain ointment, so as to darken it. . . . As most Russians are fair it was decided that the reigning family should be dark." An odd reason, surely, and an odd tale altogether. Casanova himself describes Catherine as of middle height, well made, and of majestic carriage. "She knew how to make herself agreeable to those whom she cared to interest. She was not beautiful, but pleasing, affable, and witty, devoid of all pretension, which was the more remarkable, as she had every reason to have a good opinion of herself."

There are more portraits of her later in life, and the agreement between them is a testimony to their correctness. Tooke introduces the criticism of one whom he describes simply as "an impartial observer," who, seeing her ten years after her accession, finds her "of that stature which is requisite to perfect elegance of form in a lady." "Her mouth is well proportioned, the chin round, the nose rather long; the forehead regular and open, her hands and arms round and white, her complexion not entirely clear, and her shape rather plump than meagre; her neck and bosom high, and she bears her head with peculiar grace and

dignity. She lays on, as is universally the custom with the fair sex in Russia, a pretty strong rouge." (Catherine herself told Grimm that she "could not imitate this pretty fashion of rouging." But there were others who accused her of doing so.) Tooke himself, writing of her at the end of her life, said that she preserved a gracefulness and majesty to the end. "She was of moderate stature, but well proportioned; and, as she carried her head very high, she appeared rather tall." The Prince de Ligne agreed that one scarcely noticed that she was short. His description of her was at the age of fifty, and he dwells on the characteristics of her physiognomony, in which it required no Lavater to find genius, justice, courage, depth, equanimity, sweetness, calm, and decision. "The oval of her face," he continues, "was not well defined, but was exceedingly pleasing, and frankness and gaiety dwelt on her lips. Her fine bust had been acquired rather at the expense of her waist, once slender almost to breaking; but people generally grow fat in Russia. If she had not drawn her hair back so tightly she would have looked better; it should have come down more about her face."

Some observers find something rather manlike about her. Richardson (who was tutor to Lord Cathcart's family) says that "the general effect is such that one would do an injustice in attributing to it a masculine air, and something less than justice in calling it entirely feminine." There is a pencil sketch made of her at the time of the 1762 Revolution by the Russian artist Tshemessof which seems to support this view. M. Waliszewski calls it a sketch of naif and almost gross realism, and says that the hard, smiling face, the heavy, half-masculine features stand out with brutal frankness. "It might be thought a German *vivandière* turned a nun, but never Cleopatra." The artist, we must suppose, if the other critics are just, has exaggerated what was a side of Catherine's physiognomy as of her character. It will be remembered that she had a passion for riding like a man. In her Memoirs she often represents herself as donning man's clothes, and after she had come to the throne we hear of her going to masked balls and passing as a man. On one occasion, indeed, the deception went so far that a lady with whom she had been dancing, in a sudden access of passion for her partner, tore off the mask, and discovered the features of the

Empress, who was naturally not a little annoyed. Catherine had a deep voice, but there must have been other traits which assisted her. One may recall the wonderful success of the Chevalier D'Eon in concealing his sex, and remember that in those days the dress and manner of wearing the hair made such disguises easier.

In the dress of her own sex Catherine always observed simplicity, preferring to any other the Russian style, with a jacket or dolman over a loose vest. As she grew stouter she found the old Muscovite long-sleeved loose robe disguise the fact better than other costumes. The most striking point of her attire was a small cap or bonnet set with particularly fine diamonds. She wore her hair beneath this slightly powdered, and flowing upon her shoulders.

It may seem rather unkind to the memory of Catherine's beauty to close with the criticism of Masson. Yet Masson, who saw her once or twice a week for ten years, looked on her every time with renewed admiration, and says that it was no more true of her than of Frederick the Great that *præsentia minuit famam.* "At sixty-seven she still had the remains of beauty. Her hair was always arranged with an old-fashioned simplicity, and with marked taste;

never did a crown set off a head better than hers. She was of medium height, but strongly built; and no other woman of her stoutness could carry herself so becomingly and gracefully. She walked slowly, and with short steps, with her brow high and clear, her eyes tranquil and often cast down. She would bow with a little inclination, not lacking in grace, but with an assumed smile, which came and went with her bow." Unhappily, at this age her teeth were gone and her voice broken, the lower part of her face had a touch of coarseness (*quelque chose de rude et grossier* are his exact words), and there was a line at the base of the nose which imparted a rather sinister air. This was the wrinkle which Catherine made Lampi remove in the portrait which he painted of her. Her bulk, says Masson on another page, had so increased towards the end of her life as almost to become a deformity. Her legs had swollen, and she could no longer boast the pretty foot of which she had been proud. At the time of the entertainments given to Gustavus of Sweden in 1796 several of her courtiers at great expense built specially easy staircases in their houses before inviting the Empress. No longer was there the *taille très fine* of which she wrote in

her Memoirs. But, as no less than forty-six years had passed since the date of that ball at which her appearance made such a sensation, she had no cause for complaint against the treatment of time. A figure proof against half-a-century's wear is not an Empress's to command. It is to be remarked, however, that Catherine did not become the painted old harridan that Major Martin Hume represents our own Queen Elizabeth to have been at the end of her life; yet their ages at death were only three years different. Time dealt more gently with Catherine than with Elizabeth.

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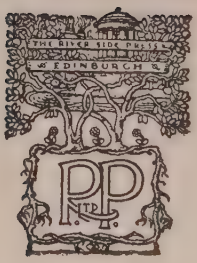
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